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Gifted adolescent academic underachievement : what the adolescents say.

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GIFTED ADOLESCENT ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT
WHAT THE ADOLESCENTS SAY

A Dissertation Presented

by

ELSIE HARTLIEB ROBERTSON

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Jeffrey W. Eiseman, Chairperson of Committee

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This Dissertation is dedicated to

The memory of my parents

Marie Sieh Hartlieb
1912 - 1955

Henry Hartlieb
1905 - 1960

to my husband of almost 30 years

Timothy Norris Robertson

"Who in their own parenthood have not met their fathers and mothers coming toward them across the years" (K. Patton, Unitarian Responsive Reading).

to our children

Andrew Henry Robertson
November 7, 1960

Kristin Marie Robertson
June 5, 1962

Lincoln Stuart Robertson
August 31, 1965

"We will make a world for the gladness of children, bringing to them the conviction of their worth and beauty which their beings crave" (K. Patton, Unitarian Responsive Reading).

and to my stepmother

Dorothy Riehl Saari Hartlieb

a woman of grace and courage
who has been my parent longer than my mother and father

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It is difficult to know how to thank all those who have been instrumental in helping me complete the doctoral process. A simple thank you seems inadequate; flowery praise seems insincere. It does seems appropriate, since the dissertation uses the subjects' own words to describe their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, to use the words of those who have been so helpful to me, to explain how important they have been to me.

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Thank you Michelle Seale, from a long ago interview for admission to Horizons Unlimited, for asking, "Talu, what do you want to do when you grow up?"

My answer to that question is found in the next 350 pages.

ABSTRACT

GIFTED ADOLESCENT ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT
WHAT THE ADOLESCENTS SAY

FEBRUARY, 1988

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The purpose of the study was to shed light on the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement. It was hypothesized that there might be an identity development pattern common to some gifted adolescent academic underachievers in which underachievement played a role.

The prevailing theme of the literature portrays underachievement in the gifted as a serious problem. A small body of data presented a different view of underachievement that was consistent with the researcher's experience.

The researcher conducted structured in-depth interviews with two small groups of gifted adolescent underachievers to obtain their perceptions, feelings, and thoughts about identity, personal competence, academic competence and purpose, and the relationship of their life experiences to personal identity, education, and self esteem.

The data were triangulated through interviews with college-aged subjects from an earlier pilot study and with six

middle-aged successful adults who were self-defined as being gifted and underachieving in high school. The data were presented in the subjects' own words; the content was inductively analyzed using techniques advocated by Miles and Huberman (1984) within the context of Eriksonian developmental theory (1950, 1968) for patterns and themes indicating a relationship between adolescent identity development and academic underachievement.

Results of the study indicated a pattern of incomplete identity development at the secondary school level, with lack of clarity concerning career and life goals. Underachievement appeared to be a manifestation of the subjects' need to work out identity issues in the intra and interpersonal spheres. The underachievement pattern appeared to change to one of achievement during young adulthood, occasionally facilitated by a mentor, and usually after a lengthy moratorium period.

A longitudinal study is recommended for the core sample and the young adults to further validate the study results. The study was limited due to the small number of respondents. Further research needs to be done with larger, more heterogeneous cohorts, including unsuccessful middle-aged adults who were identified as both gifted and academically underachieving during their high school years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter page

LIST OF TABLES

Table

page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is on gifted students' self perceptions of their academic underachievement. Three to five percent of the student population is defined as being gifted and talented according to the United States Office of Education (Marland, 1972). Within this population there are a significant number of students who are labeled underachievers, ranging from nine to fifty-four percent (Gowan, 1955; Newland, 1976; Whitmore, 1980).

The general body of gifted literature as well as the literature devoted to gifted underachievement contains research that is focused on the phenomenon of gifted underachievement. Both the general gifted/talented literature and the specific gifted underachievement literature are in agreement that the phenomenon is a problem (Clark, 1983; Gallagher, 1975; Whitmore, 1980).

The literature addresses in depth the phenomenon itself, the characteristics and behaviors that identify the underachieving gifted student, the causality of the phenomenon and the dynamics of the underachieving syndrome. In addition, the literature prescribes preventive, remedia-

tion and therapeutic measures to reverse the phenomenon (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982; Whitmore, 1980).

The underachiever is described as one who has a poor self concept and/or low self esteem, is socially isolated, displays anti-social behavior, lacks self confidence and is socially immature (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982). Whitmore (1980) describes the younger underachiever as being a perfectionist, socially and physiologically supersensitive, deficient in social skills and isolated. Gowan (1957) states that "the gifted underachiever . . . appears to be a kind of intellectual delinquent who withdraws from goals, activities and social participation" (p. 101).

An exception to the general views held about the gifted underachiever comes from Ziv (1977) who states clearly that the negative research findings regarding self image and the underachiever may be a result of student misidentification in terms of intellectual ability. Richert (1982) identifies a category of gifted student as being self actualized and states that such students may underachieve because they are able to make choices about their academic performance and accept responsibility for those choices. Davis (1984) characterizes a group of grade-school underachievers as "autonomous" and having a strong internal locus of control as opposed to those underachievers who either deny their gift or refuse to accept responsibility for it.

The researcher's position as a creative writing teacher in a summer program for gifted/talented middle school students led to the development of a long term informal relationship with many of the students during their adolescent years. Approximately one third of the students were outstanding achievers in their schools; one third performed on an average level and one third appeared to be academic underachievers. The academic underachievers did not appear to exhibit those characteristics and behaviors associated with underachievement as described in the literature. They appeared to have a wide variety of interests, to be articulate and humorous, to concentrate fully on matters of interest to them, and to be relatively unconcerned about their poor academic performance except insofar as it caused their parents and respected teachers discomfort. Since interaction with the researcher took place outside of the student family sphere and outside of the school, no observations could be made regarding the impact of family and school on the students' ways of dealing with their underachievement. The absence of serious negative behaviors suggested to the researcher that for some gifted adolescents, academic underachievement may simply be a part of their particular developmental process.

A pilot study was conducted to verify the researcher's informal observations. Three gifted adolescent under-

achievers were interviewed about their perceptions of their academic underachievement and about their perceptions of self in five categories: a) sense of competence, b) self identification, c) academic purpose, d) academic competence and e) relationship of life experience to educational and personal identity.

The characteristics and behaviors of the gifted students in the pilot study appeared to contradict those described in the underachievement literature. Data analysis revealed that two students felt good about themselves, perceiving that they were in a period of change and growth. The third student acknowledged that he did not have good feelings about his academic performance, but that these feelings were balanced by the discovery of a new ability--broadcasting. All three perform in groups; all have different groups of friends. Two mentioned that others perceived them to have strong interpersonal skills. All three require periods of solitude in which to reflect and think, yet they relate well to groups. All three have a high level of focused energy directed toward those activities that have meaning for them: for example, practicing an instrument, writing, or playing Dungeons and Dragons. They did not exhibit those characteristics usually associated with the gifted underachiever. All three students were unclear about

their future academic or career goals. They all perceived secondary school as a "holding tank" until college entry and felt that the extracurricular activities of the school addressed their needs more than the academic curriculum.

Academic issues were a part of the students' lives, but were not as meaningful as relationships with others or individual discoveries about self and becoming independent people. Each student recognized that he/she was in a process of becoming an adult and for the moment, seemed willing to accept what was happening to him/her. Their major task appeared to be the process of human development. Academic achievement appeared irrelevant because these young people did not yet have a clear life goal.

As suggested above, the prevailing premise of the majority of the literature appears to be that underachievement in the gifted student is a serious problem for the individual, the family, the school and society. The "problem" is cited in terms such as lack of productivity, loss to society, or not living up to potential.

It is the researcher's contention, based on a) experience with gifted middle and senior high school gifted academic underachievers, b) findings of a pilot study of adolescent perceptions of gifted academic underachievement conducted in 1983, and c) slight evidence in the field (Richert, 1982; Ziv, 1977) that the findings presented in

the literature and the perceptions of the gifted adolescent academic underachiever regarding themselves and the phenomenon of gifted academic underachievement may be contradictory.

Problem Statement

The literature on gifted adolescent underachievement appears to be characterized by the presentation of a point of view regarding the phenomenon of gifted underachievement that perceives the phenomenon as a problem to be remedied. A small body of data presents a different view of underachievement that is consistent with the researcher's experience and pilot research. Ziv (1977), Richert (1982), and Davis (1984) assert that some gifted underachievers either do not possess the negative characteristics ascribed to them by the dominant literature or they experience the phenomenon in a different manner. The problem addressed by this dissertation is how to make sense out of these contradictory portraits of gifted adolescent academic underachievers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to shed light on the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement.

Significance of the Problem

Increased knowledge regarding the phenomenon of gifted academic underachievement has the potential to increase understanding of the phenomenon by parents, educators and others who are responsible for nurturing and educating that percentage of the population defined as gifted. Alteration of family, school and current therapeutic practices concerning the underachiever may occur when the conflicting views in the available data are more fully understood or resolved. At this point it is unclear whether underachievement can usefully be seen as a phenomenon rather than a problem. Increased clarity on this may change the manner in which the gifted academic underachiever and others in his or her life interact. Insight on this dilemma may assist other underachieving students to better understand their experience in their own terms and help them develop strategies for handling the phenomenon.

Parents may be better able to focus on their childrens' actual needs, wants, goals and aspirations, rather than on what literature, educators and society more generally may be telling them about their child's experience. Viewing the child as a healthy individual rather than a non-contributing member of the gifted population may foster the growth of both child and parent and help to eliminate negative com-

parisons between one child and another, within and outside the family.

Those responsible for guidance within the school system may discover that the nature of counselling for the gifted underachiever may need change. If underachievement is viewed as a phenomenon rather than a problem, counseling may be directed toward meeting the needs of the student as an individual instead of being viewed as a corrective measure.

The study may show a need for change in the manner in which these students are educated within the public school system. While it is common knowledge that current educational practices and interventions do not significantly alter the underachievement patterns of the adolescent gifted, clarification of the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement may reveal specific educational needs of this population that are not currently known. Clarification of the phenomenon may also suggest the need for individuals and institutions to reframe their perceptions and attitudes towards underachievement to meet a revised view of the psychosocial and academic needs of the gifted underachieving population.

Definitions

Adolescent

A young person, male or female, between the ages of 13 and 18.

Giftedness

> "Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts" (Marland, 1972, p. 10).

For purposes of this study, the gifted child shall be limited to the student who has been identified as possessing either general intellectual ability or specific academic aptitude.

Gifted Underachiever:

> Any student, defined by his/her school system as gifted through the use of multiple criteria, who has a year grade average of below 80% or who has failed one or more academic subjects.

Self Concept:

> "A complex and dynamic system of beliefs which an individual holds true about himself, each belief with a corresponding value" (Purkey, 1967, p.7).

For purposes of this study the terms self concept and identity shall be used interchangeably.

Self Esteem:

The extent to which an individual values him or her self, ranging from high to low.

Identity Development Process:

The resynthesizing of "all childhood identifications in some unique way and yet in accordance with the roles offered by some wider section of society" (Erikson, 1968, p.156). This includes answering such questions as, "Who am I, what is my place within my family, school and community, where am I going with my education, what will my life work be, and what will my relationships with others be like?

Optimum Identity:

"A sense of psychosocial well being. It's most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in ones body, a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assurance of anticipated recognition from those who count" (Erikson, 1968, p.165).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review will be presented in three sections. The first section will review pertinent literature on the gifted. The second section will present specific material regarding the phenomenon of gifted underachievement. The third section will present a conceptual framework within which giftedness and adolescent gifted academic underachievement will be explored.

The section on giftedness will include current definitions of giftedness, identification methods, and characteristics and behaviors attributed to the gifted along with a critique of the current literature with respect to how it addresses the identity development needs of the adolescent. Because the focus of this study is on academic underachievement, primary emphasis in the review will be placed on cognitive giftedness.

There is a limited body of literature devoted soley to the perceptions gifted children have of themselves and giftedness (Delisle, 1984; Kreuger,1978). Even within this limited body of literature, references to underachievement are brief. No body of research could be found devoted soley to the perceptions of gifted and talented students regarding academic underachievement. In the general underachievement

literature specific students and their behaviors may be described (Pringle, 1970; Wellington & Wellington, 1965; Whitmore, 1980). Davis' (1984) classification of gifted underachievers into three categories (those who deny the gift, those who are concerned about the underachievement but do not take responsibility for it and those who are autonomous) includes an interview process as part of her profile. However, the interviews are not cited in terms of the underachievers' perceptions of the actual phenomenon.

Therefore, the literature review on the phenomenon of gifted underachievement will present a picture of the phenomenon as it is currently perceived by experts in the field of giftedness. The review will include definition(s), identification methods, characteristics of the gifted underachiever, dynamics of the phenomenon, and current methods of prevention, intervention and/or treatment.

The third section will present a conceptual framework within which giftedness and adolescent gifted academic underachievement will be explored. This framework focuses upon adolescent identity development and issues related to the changing role of the adolescent in American society.

Giftedness

The portion of the literature review that looks at giftedness in general will contain the following sections: current definition of giftedness, identification of giftedness, characteristics of the gifted, and profiles of the gifted person. The current literature will be critiqued with respect to how it addresses the identity development needs of the adolescent gifted student. Because the focus of this study is on academic underachievement, primary emphasis will be placed on cognitive giftedness.

Definition

The current definition of giftedness as perceived by the United States Office of Education (Marland, 1972) is as follows:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts.

This definition rejects a once commonly held belief that giftedness is synonymous only with intellectual genius and may reflect by use of the phrase "potential ability," the

thinking that giftedness is the result of interaction between the individual and his/her environment rather than the sole product of heredity. This study addresses those children whose giftedness is manifest in the realm of general intellectual ability.

Identification

Identification of giftedness is based on Terman's (1926) finding that general intellectual ability can be measured and plotted on a Bell Curve. It is commonly held that from three to five percent of the general population is cognitively gifted, and this giftedness is evidenced by a score of 130 or greater on the Stanford Binet (SB) measure of intelligence. According to Borland (1986), IQ tests

> are, and were originally designed to be nothing more than devices for generating numbers that are useful in assessing academic aptitude within a culture. They give us clues to the probable success of children in our current educational system.

Given the expanded definition of giftedness in vogue today, a variety of criteria including teacher, parental and peer nominations, tests of achievement, school grades, and behavior and characteristic checklists are all taken into consideration when a child is to be identified as gifted. The use of multiple criteria for identification purposes has increased as school systems have relied on group rather than

individual IQ tests to determine general intellectual ability. There are those who question combining multiple measures as identifiers when they are added together since each measures a different factor--e.g., potential ability, achievement, and behavior. Multiple measures are appropriate when reviewed separately (Borland, 1986). For the most part, to the dismay of Richert (1982), the IQ test remains the measure most commonly used for identification of the intellectually gifted child. Others disagree with her, finding the individual intelligence test still to be the most successful identifier of the intellectually gifted (Borland, 1986; Davis, 1984; Hagen, 1980).

The controversy appears to center on the actual abilities measured by any given IQ test. Its primary value appears to be that of an identifier of academic achievement (Kaufmann and Harrison, 1986; Robinson and Chamrod, 1986), but paradoxically may also serve as an identifier of the underachiever or handicapped whose potential is found only within a test format (Kaufmann and Harrison, 1986).

Optimum Giftedness

It is acknowledged that there appears to be an optimum IQ range. The numbers vary in meaning depending upon the mean and standard deviation of the particular test; the test referred to in this research, unless otherwise indicated, is

the Stanford Binet. The optimum IQ range (from 130-150 SB) is also defined in terms of positive cognitive skills and personality characteristics usually associated with giftedness. Beyond that point, the extent of the child's abilities may affect the behaviors and characteristics commonly associated with the gifted child (Assagioli, 1960; Hollingworth, 1942; Vargiu, 1971).

Ziv (1977) differentiates those children who are gifted from those who are merely bright. The gifted--whose IQ begins at 130 (SB)--generally display those behaviors and characteristics commonly associated with giftedness, while the bright--IQ to 120 (SB)--(who may be mistakenly identified as gifted) display more negative behaviors and characteristics.

Characteristics of the optimum gifted

A review of characteristics usually attributed to the gifted reveals three outstanding components of intellectual giftedness: a) the ability to conceptualize earlier and to a greater extent than the general population, b) the ability to abstract earlier and to a greater extent than the general population and c) the ability to learn at a rapid rate and to retain the learning for a longer period of time. In addition the intellectually gifted student exhibits a particularly high level of intellectual curiosity, has a high tolerance for ambiguity and has a longer attention span than

the general population, particularly in areas of great interest.

Seagoe (1979) includes these components in her compendium of 16 descriptors of the gifted and also describes the negative aspects of gifted characteristics and/or behaviors. For example, the person who conceptualizes, abstracts, and synthesizes beyond the general population may also be resistant to direction and dismiss the need for detail. The ability to learn rapidly and to retain the learning may be coupled with dislike for drill, routine, or basic mastery. The student may be perceived as stubborn and resistant to direction or interruption, and intense curiosity may lead the child to question standard systems, answers, and routines.

Clark (1983) expands the Seagoe concept further, dividing gifted characteristics into cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive domains, presenting a Jungian profile of the gifted. Since this study is concerned with the intellectually gifted child, Table 1 contains solely cognitive characteristics.

It may be seen from this table that for the most part, positive characteristics associated with the gifted are primarily cognitive abilities, with the negative characteristics reflecting the behaviors that may result from the higher level of cognitive ability.

Table 1
Cognitive Characteristics of the Gifted

Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics
large amount of information retentive	boredom and impatience
advanced comprehension and high language development highly verbal	child considered "smart aleck" by adults and peers; dominates discussion, uses words to avoid thinking
high level curiosity	difficulty conforming
varied interests	overextends self
rapid, flexible thought processes	frustrated with lack of activity, disruptive disrespectful to authority
ability to synthesize, to see unusual relationships, to generate original ideas and solutions	frustration with deadlines, of being considered off base, unable to conform or follow standard directions
has alternative thinking patterns	omits detail
ability to use and form conceptual frameworks	own systems conflict with those of others
evaluates self and others	demanding, compulsive, fear of failure may limit new tasks, intolerant of others
goal directed behavior	stubborn
ability to delay closure	if product required may refuse to pursue area

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Profiles of the gifted student

Terman (1925, 1947, 1954), who is credited with initiating the gifted movement in the United States (Tidwell, 1980), has developed a major profile of a gifted individual.

His longitudinal study of more than 1500 California youth demonstrated that the gifted are healthier, more popular, more achieving, live longer and are "mentally more sound " than the general population (Terman, 1926). The study was designed to compare high intelligence children with average, to observe differences between the gifted and average population, and to determine whether gifted children would meet, as adults, the early expectations placed on them by virtue of their giftedness. Sears (1979) commented that "the data available are less useful for study of group differences than for the fifty year development of a group of IQ talented, environmentally advantaged children"(p. 76). By today's standards, methodological flaws abound. Identification was based on IQ score alone; socioeconomic and ethnic balance were not maintained; follow-up studies were conducted with male subjects only (Gowan, 1979; Laycock, 1979), although Terman explains this in terms of the then-current societal norms (Seagoe, 1975). Laycock wonders about the influence on study outcomes of the long term, intense and close relationship of the researcher and his subjects. Even with these limitations, the Terman profile of the gifted student continues to be substantiated by a variety of studies (Birch and Reynolds, 1960) and continues to be considered to be an appropriate profile of the cognitively gifted student by leaders in the gifted field.

However Gallagher (1975) noted that while educational and professional accomplishments of the Terman subjects (who primarily fall in the optimum IQ range) were admirable, there did not seem to be a person of the quality of an Einstein in the sample.

Renzulli (1977) profiles the gifted person as one who exhibits gifted behaviors. He presents a person with above average ability, above average creativity, and task commitment (motivation and staying power) who brings these three characteristics to bear on a real life problem, solving the problem, and sharing it with an appropriate public. The child is gifted only when he/she can demonstrate the three sets of behaviors as they relate to an achievement. Monks and van Boxtel (1985) believe that the Renzulli profile of the gifted is particularly applicable to the adolescent, since adolescence is a time during which the young person is capable of increased abstract thought and is open to "changes in creative thinking," and during which task commitment (motivation) is "being grounded in identity formation" (p.280).

Richert (1982) has developed a set of four profiles of gifted persons, categorizing them as conforming (or closet gifted), withdrawing, rebellious, and independent (self-actualized). The profiles are based primarily on the child's

responses to the expectations of self and others. The closet gifted child is a high achiever; the achievement is based on external standards or perceived expectations of others, motivation derives from a fear of failure and satisfaction is obtained from the approval of others, not internal approval. The withdrawing gifted child is also dependent upon the external standards and is motivated by fear of both failure and success to perform on an average level. To the extent that the gifted child is performing on the average level, he/she can be said to underachieve. The rebellious child, considered by Richert to be the most divergent thinker, also underachieves. Motivation is primarily a reaction against both restrictions and external expectations or the expectations of others. That rebellion, Richert says, may be present during the early school years, but may not become obvious until the adolescent years. The independent child (whom she also refers to as self actualizing) may exhibit behavior identical to the other three profiles (i.e., achieve, withdraw or fail); however, the independent child has the ability to make "choices based on personal commitment and to accept the consequences of those decisions" (p.9).

The above profiles present portraits of the gifted child in three perspectives. Terman's gifted population is physically healthy, mentally sound with a positive self

concept and achievement orientation; Renzulli's portrait stresses achieving behavior as the hallmark of the gifted child; and Richert views the gifted child as one whose personality may or may not include achievement as an indicator of giftedness. Richert and Terman through mention of self actualization and mental health, indicate affective components of giftedness while Renzulli refers primarily to those behaviors that indicate the gift. He acknowledges the role of affect on achieving gifted behavior by describing the triad of gifted characteristics as traits and by his belief that task commitment is a product of intrinsic motivation.

Profile of the highly gifted

As stated earlier, the personality of the gifted student appears to change as the student reaches the higher levels of the IQ scales. This is explained in part by Cirinei (in Vargiu, 1971):

> This puzzling phenomenon can be accounted for by the observation that the problems of gifted children differ little from the average, and that they are better equipped to deal with them; hence their superior adaptability. On the other hand, the highly gifted, in addition to problems common to all young people, have to cope by themselves with the extremely uncommon ones associated with genius (p.2).

Vargiu (1971) describes highly gifted individuals in terms of behaviors and feelings, stating that they may be

lonely and isolated, may perceive themselves as being different with simultaneous feelings of superiority and inferiority, may have low feelings of self worth due to developmental imbalance, may have global and societal concerns, and may be engaged in a prolonged search for identity, often lasting into the late twenties.

Vargiu's profile is consistent with that of Roedell (1984) who finds the highly gifted to be socially alienated perfectionists with an unrealistic perception of the self. In addition she says

> The classic adolescent identity crisis may come earlier for highly gifted children whose intense analytical approach to life leads to early analysis of self. Their own perfectionism, coupled with inappropriate adult expectations, can make the process of identity formation particularly difficult for highly gifted children (p. 128).

Powell and Haden (1984) focus on a cognitive profile of the highly gifted, calling them "integrated thinkers" who combine an analytical and synthetic approach to cognition. This cognitive approach is reflected affectively by a poor self image as the child develops an unrealistic picture of the total self.

It may be seen from the above profiles of the gifted and highly gifted that there tends to be a major affective difference between the two groups. The difference surfaces in the area of perceptions of the self and the value

placed on those perceptions. The optimum gifted are consistently presented in a more positive light than those with higher cognitive abilities. It is interesting, however, to speculate on the self concepts and self esteem of those optimum gifted children who exhibit the negative behaviors presented by Clark and Seagoe.

Self Concept

There is some discussion and concern within the gifted field regarding the notion of self concept and its relevance to the gifted person since the concept of self is central to the personality and may be observed by characteristics and behaviors. Purkey (1976, 1970) has provided a particularly clear model of self concept. The total concept of self is "a complex and dynamic system of beliefs which an individual holds true about himself, each belief with a corresponding value"(p. 7). This self is organized into specific beliefs one holds about oneself which are divided into categories and attributes. Each of these beliefs has a greater or lesser, positive or negative value. Any change in the value of a belief usually leads to a change in other beliefs,or at least in their valuation. In short, the self is then an open system, responding to input from the environment. The self is dynamic; it seeks equilibrium and resists change to maintain consistency, but does change under the right con-

ditions. Internal motivation to maintain and enhance the self is the root of most behavior. The concept of self at any given time will vary according to the value one holds of any specific attribute of self. It might then be said that the self concept is a broad picture of who and what one is and that self esteem relates to the positive or negative values one places on that broad picture.

For the most part researchers concur that the gifted population is better adjusted and has a more positive self concept and higher self esteem than those who are considered average (Colangelo and Pfleger, 1978; Coleman and Fults, 1982; Gallagher, 1975; Janos, Fung & Robinson, 1985; Karamessinis, 1980; Tidwell, 1980) with the following caveats: the higher self esteem is based on students awareness of their higher abilities (Colangelo & Pfleger, 1978) and is higher for those in heterogeneous classrooms (Gallagher, 1975; Harty, Adkins & Hungate, 1984).

Leaverton and Herzog (1979) however, found on Katenmeyer and Stenner's Self Observation Scales that the gifted were not as well adjusted as the Terman studies indicated and that in fact in the areas of self acceptance and social confidence scored significantly below the mean. Coleman and Fults found that the self concept of gifted students dropped compared to other gifted students when they were placed in a homogeneous classroom while the self con-

cept of the average high achiever in the regular classroom was higher in general than the gifted student in the homogeneous setting. The Janos study reported a lower self concept for those gifted students who perceived themselves as being different from others; they based their conclusion on the premise that the gifted perceived themselves as being different because of their abilities and the gap between their real and ideal. This appears to contradict Colangelo and Pfleger who feel that the higher self concept of the gifted is based on their awareness of their ability. In a comparison of gifted populations, Geffen(1982) found that negative perceptions of the self increased as students reached upper elementary school levels and that the negative perceptions were more common among male than female students.

In summary, it would appear that self concept of the gifted population in general is more positive and self esteem higher than that of the average population but that within the broad range of giftedness there is a range of perceptions regarding the self.

Identity Development

Identity development is considered to be the task of the adolescent. The formation of a strong identity is connected with the perceptions one has of oneself, whether positive or negative. Identity development takes place in-

trapersonally, interpersonally and within the greater community. The literature on giftedness speaks to cognitive, psychological and/or sociological developmental issues (Clark, 1983; Newland, 1976; Perrone and Pulvino, 1979; Tannenbaum, 1983) that take place in each of the above arenas. The gifted literature does not appear to address the specific issue of identity development, even when discussing the gifted adolescent. Richert alludes to the self-actualized gifted person. From a developmental perspective this researcher assumes that one who is self-actualized will have developed a strong sense of personal identity. Vargiu alone, when referring to the highly gifted, acknowledges that the quest for identity development may begin at an earlier age due to the cognitive abilities of the gifted and that for the highly gifted this quest make take a longer period of time to complete than for the general population. Norfleet (1968) when studying gifted achieving and underachieving college women indicated that the underachieving women may not have completed the identity development process. The paucity of material in this area indicated to the researcher that a closer examination of the relationship of giftedness, adolescence, and the identity development process was in order.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature adequately defines giftedness as it is perceived by experts in the field today and presents tools with which to identify those children who represent the higher percentage of the population. The major tool for identifying the cognitively gifted is the IQ test which appears to be an adequate predictor of ability to achieve within the school setting. In addition to cognitive measures, the gifted child today is also identified by observation of a variety of characteristics and behaviors that are usually more pronounced and exhibited than in the general population. Researchers point to a personality and behavior difference when the IQ (SB) is measured above 150. This difference tends to be negative and appears to focus on the self concept of the child.

Profiles of the gifted have been presented that give the reader pictures of a gifted person from several perspectives. The gifted child is presented as a complex individual examined by researchers much as the elephant was examined by three blind men of the Sufi tale. One examines the child from the perspective of cognitive development alone, on occasion to be measured by the IQ and on another occasion to be measured by characteristics that assume a high level of cognitive development. Another examines the

child from a behavioral perspective; only those behaviors that result in achievement define one as gifted and the onus to be defined as gifted is placed on the child. A few examine the affective nature of the person to seek the gift. Yet another looks to the relationship between the child and the environment in fostering the development of a gifted human being. In general, the gifted literature does not contain discussions of either the nature of or the relevance of processes of identity development. Richert's view comes closest to integrating the many aspects of the personality as she presents her gifted portraits; she does not address head-on the possible relationship between identity development and giftedness. Vargiu, when discussing the highly gifted, observes that the time required to complete the process of identity development may be longer than that of the average child.

The researcher asserts that there are significant relationships to be explored concerning the gifted adolescent and academic performance and that these relationships should be investigated in the framework of the adolescent task of identity development.

Gifted Underachievement

Introduction

The phenomenon of underachievement has been found in 9 to 54% of the gifted population (Gowan, 1955; Newland, 1976; Raph, etc., 1966; Whitmore, 1980). It is primarily a phenomenon among males in a ratio of at least 2 to 1 (Clark, 1983; Zilli, 1971), and is often first observable during the grade school years (Shaw & McCuen, 1960; Whitmore, 1980). It is a phenomenon that has been characterized as situational--occuring in response to a specific problem--or chronic--recurring in a pattern that is difficult to eliminate (Clark, 1983). For purposes of this study, the researcher is examining academic underachievement that represents a long term pattern of behavior for the gifted adolescent student.

A variety of research projects on gifted underachievement have been done without consistency in definition of giftedness or of gifted underachievement, and without standards of identification and sample selection. Data from studies on elementary, middle school, secondary school, and college students are used interchangeably. Data from studies conducted in different parts of the world are not differentiated according to culture. The variety of research ap-

proaches has contributed to the inconsistency of research results (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982).

Prior to this review of pertinent underachievement literature, it is worthwhile noting that there is some disagreement within the field regarding both the concept of underachievement and the terminology used to describe over and under achievement as part of academic performance. Lowther (in Clark, 1983) prefers use of the terms "high," "average," and "low" to record achievement, while Ehrlich (1982) states that the term "overachievement" is meaningless by itself since it is impossible to achieve beyond potential. Thorndyke (in Clark, 1983) rephrases the term "underachievement" (which places responsibility for the phenomenon on the student) to "overprediction" which implies the use of faulty identification criteria.

It is also worthwhile to note that there appears to be an implicit assumption within the literature that the gifted student needs to achieve as a demonstration of his/her responsibility to society. Kowitz (1966) takes exception to this perspective:

> Few of the reports give much thought to the problem of individual rights and freedom. They assume that every student has an obligation to strive for maximum academic achievement regardless of his personal interests or desires. ...Our own social philosophy is generically dedicated to the right of each individual to determine his own destiny. Although the school has

> a mission to show each child the range of potentials and possibilities, there are at least several serious ethical questions about the limits on the responsibility (p. 464).

In agreement, Wellington and Wellington (1965) have said more simply, "It is even arguable that individuals are best left to themselves to drift if this is what they desire, and that living up to one's potential is not, after all, very desirable"(p. 15).

Format

This review follows the format of Dowdall and Colangelo (1982) who, having conducted an extensive review of appropriate material, concluded that "the last twenty years of research on underachieving gifted students has produced more confusion and circularity than clarity and direction" (p. 182). The researcher has examined the literature cited by Dowdall and Colangelo and will triangulate their data with other pertinent material. Areas to be considered in this review include definition, identification, causality and dynamics, characteristics of the gifted underachieving student, and current interventions.

Definition

The gifted underachiever has been defined in a variety of ways, with a common factor being the discrepancy that exists between perceived or potential ability (evidenced usually by an IQ score) and demonstrated student ability (as evidenced by grades, achievement scores or behaviors). It is the amount of the discrepancy that causes the problem in definition (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982). Perceived or potential ability as defined by an IQ score ranges from 110 (Shaw & McCuen, 1960) through 120 (Pringle, 1970) to 132 (Sauterman & Michael, 1980). Ziv (1977) says underachievement occurs "when a child with a high IQ has low grades in school" but uses an IQ score of 140 to define intellectual giftedness. In addition, a variety of tests may be used to arrive at this figure.

Gowan (1957) considers student performance one standard deviation below ascribed ability level to define underachievement, while Fine and Pitts (1980) look for "remarkable discrepancies in the child's academic performance" (p.51). Clark's (1983) gifted underachiever is "someone who has shown exceptional performance on a measure of intelligence and who, nevertheless, does not perform as well as expected for students of the same age on school related tasks" (p. 324), while Delisle (1982) believes "it

is the discrepancy between what is accomplished and what is expected that defines the term" (p.16). Common to all definitions is the notion that there is a marked difference between what is expected of the student and what the student produces, regardless of how this is measured.

Identification

Identification of the gifted academic underachiever has as its base the individual definition of the phenomenon. Identification of the gifted underachiever, as of the general gifted population, is based on a variety of measures, objective and subjective. Objective measures include IQ and achievement tests, and in some instances grades. Subjective measures include teacher checklists, perceptions, and grades, as well as parental, peer, and self perceptions and observations. The key identifier is usually the discrepancy between the scores on standardized tests and teacher perceptions (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1984).

In common with the general gifted population, early identification of the gifted underachiever is recommended. A major study by Shaw and McCuen (1960) to determine whether or not underachievement could be observed at a specific grade level points out both the need for early identification and the difficulties inherent in the identification process.

The sample consisted of 134 male and female eleventh and twelfth graders from two large public high schools who were in the upper 25% of ability level in their schools. Underachievers were identified as those students who obtained a score of 110+ on the Pinter General Ability Test and a cumulative grade point average for grades 9, 10, and 11 that was below the mean of their particular class. Those students with a score of 110+ and a grade point average above the mean of their particular class were considered to be achievers. The mean varied from class to class. The grade point average for each subject was then computed for each grade, 1 through 11. The results showed that the underachieving males were clearly receiving grades lower than the norm in the third grade, with some evidence of this at grade 1. The gifted female underachievers received better grades than their counterparts until grade 6. At that time there was a drop in grade average continuing until grade 11. The drop became significant at grade 9. At grade 11, the differences between both samples decreased due to a drop in the grades of the achievers.

The authors offer little insight into the phenomenon as observed in the female student. They do state that their findings support the hypothesis that the phenomenon of gifted underachievement in both sexes is difficult to modify

and that early identification of the gifted underachiever may provide for earlier and less time consuming interventions.

The identification process used in this widely cited study has a base IQ score of 110 which defines a student as gifted. Nowhere in the gifted literature is a score of 110 cited as evidence of intellectual giftedness without a significant number of other criteria. The study differentiates between students who achieve and who do not achieve compared to an aptitude score-based prediction. It does not appear to differentiate between the gifted child and others. It would be of interest to compare the results of this study with one focusing on the top five percent of the student body rather than the top quarter (twenty-five percent).

Causes

Tannenbaum (1983) has "diagnosed" five causes of underachievement that he believes should serve as the first step in identifying the underachieving student. They include students with (a) overestimated general abilities, (b) inadequate special abilities of any type, (c) inadequate drive, mental health or personality supports, (d) no nurturing from home, school, or community, and (e) those with problems beyond anyone's control. The customary identifying measures are useful in that they describe common behaviors

and attributes of the underachieving student, but must be coupled with accurate knowledge of the underlying factors in order to intervene in an appropriate manner.

Havighurst (1961) regards underachievers as "products of an inadequate processing in the home, the community and the school" (in Muss, 1971, p.139). It is generally agreed that a combination of factors contribute to the phenomenon. Among these major factors are: (a) personality structure of the student (Gallagher, 1975); (b) family dynamics in which "home climate is considered to be a strong factor in under-achievement" (Zilli, 1971, P.284); and (c) the school that, according to Ziv (1977), "pays little attention to the child who is out of tune with its usual expectations" (p.50). In addition, societal (community) perceptions of the phenomenon and its beliefs about responsibility for that phenomenon further complicate the situation.

"The issue arises though, as to the etiology of underachievement. Is it based internally, emanating from an individual's personal choices, laziness or inability to achieve? Or is underachievement more of a perception others share about an individual" (Delisle, 1982, p.16). An answer to Delisle's question and one that places responsibility for the underachievement on the child is given by Gowan (1957) who says that "the gifted underachiever...appears to be a kind of intellectual delinquent who withdraws from goals,

activities, and active social participation" (P.101). Delisle responds by stating clearly that underachievement is a learned phenomenon, taught covertly and overtly by family, school, and community and that responsibility for underachievement does not rest with the child.

Fine (1967) and Clark (1983) agree that poor teaching can affect the gifted underachiever, citing incompetence, insecurity, use of sarcasm, ridicule and threats, and lack of challenging material for the gifted student.

A summary of causes underlying underachievement reveals error in measurement as a possible factor. Family dynamics and attitudes of families toward education are another possible cause. Students may choose to underachieve for a variety of reasons, or they may lack the necessary skills to do the work. In addition, teacher and counselor attitudes may foster underachievement (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982).

Motivation

Motivation, according to Newland (1976), "is taken to denote the operation of conditions, either outside or within the individual, which are conducive to his responding in certain ways or which dispose him to react in certain ways" (p.105). Conditions outside the individual are considered extrinsic and are based on others' standards or needs; those

coming from within are considered intrinsic and are measured by one's internal standards or needs. Motivation may then be considered to emanate from the interaction of the individual and his/her environment.

Maslow (1970) postulates a hierarchy of needs ranging from basic survival through human interaction to transpersonal existence. These needs, he claims, are the motivating forces in life; as the basic needs are met one intrinsically begins to strive for the higher needs.

Psychoanalytic theory has claimed that "strong motivational forces rather than intellectual forces were the real determinants of giftedness" (Laycock, 1979, p.60), while Tannenbaum (1983) points to a number of "nonintellectual facilitators" of giftedness: "the social, emotional, and behavioral characteristics that can release or inhibit the full use of a person's abilities" (p. 153). Motivation (as well as self concept) is one of these facilitators. Pierce and Bowman (in Kornrich, 1965) credit Havighurst with a theory of educational motivation that includes intrinsic and social motivation as well as an unconscious need for and value of achievement. In addition, Havighurst mentions "constitutional and health factors" to be motivating elements for the gifted achiever.

Motivation, then, whether general or specific to the academic situation, may be perceived as intrinsic or extrinsic but at all times reflects an interaction with the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community environments in which one lives. However, discussion of motivation and its relationship to giftedness appears to center primarily either on the need to achieve or on academic underachievement (Khatena, 1982; Tannenbaum, 1983). It is generally agreed that the gifted appear to be intrinsically motivated while the lack of motivation, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, is cited in the literature as a factor in gifted academic underachievement.

Motivation as a factor in achievement is borne out by the 1940 follow-up study of the original Terman group in which the 150 more and 150 least successful men were examined (Terman, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1947). Success in life, defined as "the extent to which a subject has made use of his superior intellectual ability; little weight being given to earned income" (Terman, 1954; p.20), of 730 men, 25 years old or older was rated. The high achievers or successful men were labeled "A," the low achievers or less successful men were labeled "C." Despite the fact that there was only a five point IQ difference between the groups at the time of the original study, 90% of the A's graduated from college, and were 15 months younger at the time of

graduation than the 37% of the C's who completed college (An unpublished manuscript of Terman's [in Seagoe, 1975] gives this figure as 50%). Half of the A's had honors; 14% of the C's were honor students. The A's had more education than the C's. The A families had a higher educational level than the C's, had more fathers with college degrees, and had more books in their homes. Four additional traits were found to be significantly higher in the A's than the C's: prudence, perseverance, self confidence, and the desire to excel (achievement motivation). The A's had fewer inferiority feelings than the C's and reported that their goals were integrated rather than nebulous (drifting). Terman concluded that non-intellectual factors including motivation were necessary components of success as he defined it.

Blish (1963) argues that poor motivation is a major cause of underachievement in school even though the student may be motivated in extracurricular activities, while Whitmore (1986) reframes the concept somewhat:

> [It] is never accurate to say that a student is unmotivated; the fact is, the child may be unmotivated to do specific schoolwork assigned but is motivated to engage in other learning activities or more rewarding alternatives, such as social interaction or daydreaming. The problem is . . . a product of a mismatch between the child's motivational characteristics and the opportunities provided in the classroom (p.67).

Terman points up the importance of motivation independent of his subjects' intellectual ability as a factor in achievement, concluding that intelligence tests may predict success in the schoolroom, but may not predict success in the adult world. This particular follow up study also points out other variables involved in motivation; the Terman subjects from the start were healthier, were generally from a secure socioeconomic background, and were academically motivated during their early years. He also points out that some of his least successful subjects came to adulthood during the Depression and factors outside their control may have contributed to their lack of success.

Blish and Whitmore both acknowledge a relationship between motivation to achieve academically and academic achievement, but admit that the underachieving student may be motivated in other arenas. Their thesis implies choice of achievement arena by students to meet their own particular needs whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, or academic.

Dynamics

Fine and Pitts (1980) compiled a series of intra and interpersonal dynamics that contribute to the behaviors and characteristics common to the gifted underachiever. The behaviors exhibited by the child are reflective of internal

psychodynamics while the behaviors are reinforced by the quality of the interaction among the child, family, teachers, and peers.

1. low self esteem
2. basic skill deficiency
3. pseudo motor deficiency
4. verbal skill in intellectualizing and rationalizing behaviors
5. reinforcement of the pattern by parents and teachers
6. adultizing the child by parents and teachers
7. familial acting out of conflicts through scapegoating the gifted underachiever
8. parent school conflicts
9. outside interests that use energy
10. social isolation of the underachiever due to poor social skills

Gallagher (1975) believes that underachievement is primarily an intrapersonal phenomenon, the result of a complex personality pattern while Stern (in Zilli, 1971) believes that the attitude of the underachiever is the primary dynamic of the phenomenon. Karnes (1961) postulated social and emotional maladjustment as the primary factors in underachievement, noting however that some maladjusted gifted achievers may attempt to solve their problems through overachievement.

Karnes's (1961) study of 41 gifted achieving and non-achieving elementary school pupils used an IQ base of 120 (Stanford Binet individual test) and achievement discrepancy scores of plus or minus one standard deviation. She found underachievers to be less realistic in their self concepts

than overachievers, and to be less creative. She found their parents more controlling than parents of over-achievers, in contrast to Drews's (1965) study that found mothers of high achievers to be authoritarian. It is interesting to note that the mean IQ of Karnes's gifted underachievers was 140 as compared to 130 of the achieving students.

Characteristics

The literature on general giftedness contains sets of characteristics attributed to gifted children that have been used as the base to present specific profiles of the gifted child. The underachievement literature presents a more general picture of the gifted underachiever whose profile emerges from those characteristics and conditions within the child and family that are addressed within the literature.

Dowdall and Colangelo's compendium of characteristics of the gifted underachiever include social immaturity, emotional problems, antisocial behavior, and low self concept. The families of such students are thought to be unstable, have a lower income, to be single parent families, and have fewer social or educational opportunities (p.181) than the families of the achieving gifted.

Whitmore (1980) suggests yet other characteristics: the gifted underachiever has a low self concept, profound

and expert interest in a single area, and has a wide range of interests--particularly in the arts and sciences; may be more rigid in interests; does not respond to conventional motivators; is hyperactive, generally immature, and chronically inattentive; and sets unrealistically high standards that insure failure.

Clark's (1984) summary of gifted characteristics and behaviors of the underachiever includes low self concept and feelings of rejection, helplessness, hostility, and victimization. The students may lack academic skills and motivation to achieve, have poor study habits, refrain from participating in classroom discussions, and tend to be less intellectually adaptive. They procrastinate and are socially immature. They do not have outside interests or career goals, and cannot set future goals. They may adopt goals that have been set for them that may not be consistent with their abilities or interests.

Zilli (1971) asserts that the gifted underachiever has a negative self concept, judges him/herself honestly, is negative in evaluating others, is immature, lacks self discipline and persistence, has poor study habits, has no goals, and has not made a career choice. In addition, the child and his/her parent may differ with respect to goals and plans for the child's future. She finds that the

families of underachievers have less education than families of achievers and there is either a high degree of parental authoritarianism or excess permissiveness.

Norfleet (1968), in a study of 29 achieving and 26 underachieving gifted college women, utilized the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and Gough's Adjective Check List to determine self perceptions and interpersonal relation modes. All women had a minimum standard score of 60 on the SCAT; achievers and underachievers were differentiated according to their cumulative grade point average, above or below a regression line of predicted performance. Results of the CPI indicated that the underachievers are less responsible, mature, or tolerant than the achievers, and are less aware of the needs of self and others. The ACL revealed self descriptors by the underachievers characteristic of those who have strong interpersonal skills but who may be more immature and less socialized than achievers. She concludes that "the underachiever may still be searching for her place, values, goals, and identity" (1979).

The review indicates that among the most observed characteristics of the gifted underachiever are low self concept, immaturity, lack of motivation, laziness, a sense of isolation, and lack of career goals. Parental attitudes and expectations of the gifted student and their attitude

toward education may foster the phenomenon, while poor teaching and what appears to be lack of knowledge about the gifted and how they learn are suspected of being primary factors within the school With the exception of Norfleet, who acknowledges briefly the role identity development may play in the underachievement process, and Richert, whose profile acknowledges a variety of positive and negative behaviors attributed to the general gifted population, the literature regarding behaviors and characteristics of the gifted underachiever is generally negative.

The characteristics and behaviors attributed to the gifted child may be viewed from three perspectives around which the behaviors cluster. Since the child lives as part of an open human system, each characteristic or behavior is reflected in the intrapersonal, family, and school life of the student. Table 2 categorizes the behaviors by domain.

Self Concept

Of all the characteristics attributed to the gifted underachiever, poor self concept is mentioned most frequently in the literature. Two studies address the issue of self concept from a perspective unlike the majority of the literature. Ziv (1977) theorizes that the self concept of gifted underachievers is higher than that of achieving gifted students (attributing this in part to both the

Table 2

Characteristics and Conditions within three Domains that foster Gifted Academic Underachievement

The child	The family	The School
low self concept	low socioeconomic status	poor teaching
immaturity	parental attitudes toward education	improper testing
negative	conflict with school	grading system
lack of motivation	adultizing the child	no challenge
rebellious	family expectations of child	lack academic skills
isolated	degree of authority in home	lack guidance
aloneness rigid interests social orientation		teacher's attitude toward child

inaccuracy and the variety of identification measures used by researchers that results in false positive identification of giftedness) while Raph, Goldberg and Passow (1966) found that positive self concept in the adolescent underachiever related more to mastery than to general intelligence; there was no significant difference in self concept profiles between the achieving and underachieving population except in the area of mastery of school tasks in which the underachievers assessed themselves as less able than the

achieving population. (This particular study will be covered in more detail in the section on intervention).

There are two underachieving populations of gifted students according to Ziv, the bright whose IQ range is 110-120 and the gifted with an IQ of 123+. In greater Tel Aviv, he paired 67 children, grades 5-8 with IQ scores of 140 with 67 children who had IQ scores of 110. The upper third of each sample were achievers, the lower third underachievers. The sample population consisted of students defined as gifted achievers, gifted underachievers, bright achievers, and bright underachievers. The children and their parents were given a series of tests designed to measure self concept and anxiety. Analysis revealed that the gifted underachievers had a more positive self image than the gifted achievers, but the bright achievers had a higher self image than the bright underachievers. The bright achievers did not exhibit as positive a self image as did the gifted underachievers. However, these bright achievers appeared to feel more positive about themselves than the gifted achievers. The data "support the general idea that self-concept is higher for achievers than underachievers but only for average children"(p. 567). The parents of the gifted underachievers felt more positively about their children than the parents of the gifted achievers. Ziv (1977) con-

cludes that parents who are aware of and supportive of their child's extracurricular activities place value on the child as a person rather than the child as a student.

Davis (undated) has drawn a series of profiles that illustrate a variety of self concepts of the gifted underachiever. They include; (a) "ostriches" who are either aggressive or withdrawn and over or underestimate their competence, (b) those who march to a different beat, intrinsically motivated students who work on their own interests, goals, and time frames, (c) "skimmers", extrinsically motivated students who process information superficially for other people, (d) "buck passers" who see their academic destiny in the control of others, and (e) "space cadets" whose locus of control appears to be unknown.

The conclusions of the above studies indicate to the researcher that the self concept of the gifted underachiever may not be as negative as the majority of the literature suggests. Motivation to achieve as described earlier may be seen in the gifted underachiever in arenas other than the academic. The parents in Ziv's study appreciate their children and support the outside interests in which the children are active. Given the prior discussion on self concept, it may be concluded that the outside interest and parental support play a large part in the child's perception of self

and that this is more important to the child than academic success.

He also indicates to this researcher that improper false positive identification of the gifted may lead to the development of a negative self image. A false positive identification of giftedness that results in student placement just beyond the student's range of abilities and/or interests provides an academic arena for mediocrity and failure. When the student is successful (according to true ability), the performance or product is still sub-standard in relationship to the genuinely gifted student's performance or products; stress and anxiety result.

The Raph, Goldberg, and Passow subjects differed from their gifted peers only in one arena, that which specifically relates to subject mastery (academic achievement). Davis (1984) acknowledges that some of her subjects appear autonomous and take responsibility for their actions; they work on their own interests and skills; academic achievement may be genuinely irrelevant to them. However, she also states that the autonomy may be a problem in itself since the students do not acknowledge that power in the classroom lies within the teacher.

Identity Development

There appears to be no literature in the gifted field directly concerned with a possible relationship between giftedness, underachievement, and identity development. Pirozzo (1982) hints at a relationship when, speaking of intervention, he states that "these students seem to require an extensive period of self-discovery in a non-threatening atmosphere" (p.20). Norfleet (1968) and Vargiu (1971) indicate that the gifted underachiever may need a longer time span in which to develop, while Roedell (1984) acknowledges that identity crises may occur earlier in adolescence for the gifted than the non-gifted. Richert does not speak directly to the underachiever when she profiles the gifted population; she does acknowledge that underachievement may be a part of some gifted adolescents' development pattern.

Intervention

Intervention into the phenomenon of gifted academic underachievement appears to have two broad approaches: (a) the psychodynamic approach which includes individual, family, peer group counseling and behavior modification and (b) changing the classroom environment. Neither approach appears to be particularly successful over a long period of time (Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982).

Counseling

In the case of the first model, it is often recommended that counseling be begun in the elementary years when the phenomenon is first identified. Many of the studies on counseling as an intervention strategy focus on the high school student, yet "intervention during the elementary years, involving the entire family in a group counseling mode, has had the most and longest lasting impact" (Clark, 1983, p.283). There continues to be variability in definition and identification of the student labeled underachieving for purposes of counseling. Counseling of any form appears to have short term success since when the human contact is terminated, the student does not maintain the changes in behavior.

A number of studies have focused on counseling the underachieving adolescent. In general, grade increases and positive behavior changes have been noted during the process or shortly thereafter. However long term changes were not evident. Perkins and Wicas (1971) found that counseling appeared to be more effective when mothers were part of the process, but changes and grade increases were not sustained for more than five months. Finney and Van Dalsem (1969) conducted four semesters of weekly group counseling for 60 gifted high school sophomore underachievers which resulted

in positive changes in classroom behaviors, but no change in grades.

Environmental Manipulation

Gallagher (in Zilli, 1971) postulates that "manipulating the educational environment might be a more useful approach than counseling underachievers"(p. 291). Successful educational manipulation (as evidenced by grade improvement) in specific situations includes use of underachievers as tutors (Bar-Eli & Raviv, 1982), use of independent study with support from teachers and community (Briscoe, 1977; Purkey, 1967), and attending to basic skill achievement (Fearn, 1982).

A three year study of the DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City (Raph, Goldberg & Passow, 1966) placed its major focus on intervention techniques to remediate gifted adolescent academic underachievement with a minor focus on the characteristics of the students. The population included 102 gifted boys identified at the time of ninth grade completion with an IQ of 120+, and year school grade average of below 80%. Matched pairs were formed; the students were placed in special class (S) or control (C) groups. The controls were not identified publicly. At the same time, an honors (H) group of high achievers was identified.

Three major classroom interventions were designed and implemented. The first, a home-room social studies class,

retained a homogeneous group of underachievers for home room and one subject class, both with the same teacher. The second, a special geometry class, was also homogeneous, stressing concept formation and development of work study skills, and minimizing drill and memorization. The third intervention, a guidance and study skills group, provided a homogeneous group with a study period immediately following home room, with the same teacher. The study period stressed conferences, group discussion, and skill development. In each situation a control group was also established; in the social studies class the honors group was also studied. Success for the student in each group appeared to depend on the personality and skill of the teacher. In the social studies and geometry classes, there was a new teacher at the end of a semester, with noticeable negative change in both student behavior and grades. The teacher in the third class was inconsistent in his behavior.

The researchers found that "twenty to thirty percent of all entering tenth grade underachievers improved significantly during the three years of high school whether they received special attention or not" (p.178), concluding that "efforts initiated at the senior high school level show little promise of success" (p.179). For this group of high school students, homogeneous grouping was not a successful

intervention. To intervene successfully in the phenomenon of underachievement, they suggest that one might be "studying early childhood learning patterns rather than adolescent ones, if the nature of underachievement is to be more clearly understood" (p. 198).

Combined Approach

A more recent project conducted at the elementary level suggests that a combination of human interaction skill development coupled with manipulation of the educational environment may be more successful than a unilateral approach to the phenomenon. Whitmore (1980) postulates that "the actual causes of underachievement are a mixture of the student's characteristics and a social environment that does not meet the needs of the child" (p.190). Her two year project in the Cupertino School District (California) involved 29 second and third grade students who scored 140+ on an individual Stanford-Binet intelligence test, who were not performing grade level work in the classroom, and who were displaying negative behaviors. Whitmore isolated four general sets of characteristics typical of the underachieving elementary-aged gifted student (perfectionism, physiological and social supersensitivity, isolation due to social skill deficiency, and a feeling that parents had unrealistic expectations of them), and further classified the students as

either perfectionistic, neurologically handicapped, behaviorally disordered, or learning disordered. Situational responses at home and at school were either aggressive or withdrawn.

Presuming that the school system is part of the child's social environment, Whitmore promulgated four academic program goals:

1. changing classroom behavior
2. modifying self perceptions and building self esteem
3. developing social skills for citizenship and leadership
4. remediating the academic deficiencies to close the gap between aptitude and achievement (p.198).

Program and curriculum designed by Whitmore (1980, 1984) for the gifted underachieving elementary student includes experiential, self directed, and participative group learning experiences. Discussion is encouraged with time set aside each day to look at behaviors and responsibility for behaviors. Program and curriculum are differentiated to meet the needs of the individual child.

Half way through the project, two thirds of the students were able to return to regular classroom programming. At the end of the two year project, students had made rapid achievement gains in subject matter, were able to make decisions, set realistic goals, and were less withdrawn and/or hostile. A follow up study in 1972 revealed a con-

tinuation of behavior changes in a positive direction. However, nine junior high school boys held negative attitudes toward school and had a low self concept. They felt there was lack of respect for them as individuals within the school, that adults did not accept them, and that there was lack of flexibility, limited discussion time, and little creative activity within the junior high school structure. A 1975 follow up showed a continuation of the decline in attitude toward school.

It may be inferred that the success of the Whitmore project in the elementary school years is due to (a) recognition of the interaction between the child's needs and the school environment, (b) early identification of the intellectually gifted child using multiple criteria, (c) early intervention for a prolonged period of time, and (d) a classroom structure designed to meet the needs of each child. Given the attitudes of the junior high school students, it would be interesting to be aware of the long term academic and personal gains of the students. The decline in attitude during the junior high school years is perhaps a matter for concern and may possibly reflect a lack of attention to the developmental needs of the young adolescent, particularly as he/she begins the task of identity development.

It would appear that in terms of grade improvement, the more successful interventions are those that are implemented in the early grade school years, that attend to the cognitive and affective needs of the student, and that alter the educational environment to meet those cognitive and affective needs. However, long term effectiveness of the Whitmore process may be questioned in light of the negative attitude found in some of the junior high school students that appears to be based on perceived lack of attention to those factors that Whitmore considers crucial to student achievement.

Summary

This review of the literature on gifted underachievement has presented current findings and attitudes regarding the phenomenon. It can be seen that underachievement is regarded as as problem by experts in the field. The phenomenon does not appear to have been studied from a developmental perspective other than the characterization of some gifted underachievers as immature. The gifted student who underachieves is perceived as having multiple negative characteristics, personality problems, some negative family interactive patterns, and problems in school. A low self concept appears to be the primary characteristic of the gifted underachiever. Responsibility for underachievement

appears to be mainly that of the student with some acknowledgment made of the role of the school.

A minority point of view is expressed by both Ziv and Raph, Goldberg, and Passow who have found the general self concept of the gifted underachiever to either surpass or be equal to the gifted achiever, while Davis acknowledges that some gifted underachievers have a strong sense of who and what they are.

It can also be seen that there is a lack of consensus within the field regarding the definition of underachievement, the means by which the underachiever is identified, and the interventions considered appropriate to prevent, remediate, or solve the problem. It is apparent that current interventions are generally not successful in the long run. With few exceptions, the phenomenon is not explored from the student's perspective. This study explores the phenomenon of gifted academic underachievement from the student perspective to provide clarity with respect to some of the current issues, and explores the relationship between identity development and the adolescent gifted underachiever.

Conceptual Framework
The Adolescent and Society

Approach to the Problem

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement. The researcher's approach to the study is based on a conceptual framework that focuses upon adolescent identity development and highlights issues related to the changing role of the adolescent in American society. This model will be used to structure an exploration of giftedness and gifted underachievement. The study assumes that the process of identity development is the main task of the adolescent in today's western society, and that for some gifted/talented adolescents who are part of an open human system that interacts with the environment, academic underachievement may be part of their personal developmental process.

Adolescence

Adolescence is commonly considered to be the period of time in a person's life between the ages of 13 and 18, although physiologically it begins with the onset of puberty and concludes with final development of long bone growth. Adolescence is also a process. Friedenberg (1959) has described adolescence as

> the period during which a young person learns who he is, and what he really feels. It is the time during which he differentiates himself from his culture though on the culture's terms. It is the age at which, by becoming a person in his own right, he becomes capable of deeply felt relationships to other individuals clearly perceived as such. (p. 29)

Eisenberg (1965) puts it a bit differently.

> Adolescence may be defined as a critical period of human development manifested at the biological psychological, and social levels of integration, of variable onset and duration but marking the end of childhood and setting the foundation for maturity (p. 33).

The process, which depends upon cultural and societal expectations as well as on physiological maturation may, in western society, extend well into the twenties even though the onset of puberty for many is below the age of 13 (Buescher, 1985).

The adolescent is developing in a variety of directions during this period of time; physically, cognitively and pyschosocially (Bellack, J., Kopala, B. & Reighley, J., 1983). Each of these areas of growth and change includes both human needs, and behaviors and characteristics that meet those needs. Psychosocial development is a part of the Eriksonian task of identity development and includes an increase in socialization with both peers and adults. Physical growth and development includes sexual and hormonal changes, changes in nutritional needs and needs for physical activity. Cognitive development is characterized by the

onset of abstract thinking, an increased ability to generalize findings and the ability to "think about thinking." Eisenberg (1965) includes cognitive development and personality formation as part of the pyschological growth process and allocates the process of social development a specific place. He acknowledges the interrelationship among the specific adolescent developmental processes, pointing out that "events at any one level can impede or accelerate developments at each of the others" (p. 32).

The psychosocial needs of the adolescent include primarily the need for love, dignity and respect, for honest relationships with adults, for intimacy, for choice and responsibility, for meaningful work and competence, and for independence (Buescher, 1985; Hruska, unpublished). They are or are not met as a result of interaction with the environment. The behaviors/characteristics attributed to the adolescent may also be seen as a product of the complex interrelationship of the human organism and the system (environment) in which he/she lives.

Among the behaviors and characteristics generally associated with adolescence and adolescents are self consciousness, rapid mood swings, concern about peer relationships (including peer identification and acceptance), limit testing for personal and competency skills, idealism, rebel-

lion against authority, concern with body image, and vascillation between dependence and independence with significant adults (Baumrind, 1975; Elkind, 1967; Eisenberg, 1965; Golinko, 1984; O'Connor, 1975). Elkind (1967, 1981) refers to the egocentricity of the adolescent, which includes being self critical as well as self admiring, the belief in the "personal fable" that one's feelings are unique only to one's self and that one is immortal. The egocentrism fades as the cognitive skill of formal operational thinking and the psychosocial task of identity development is completed. Baumrind (1975) finds adolescents to be "omnipotent in imagination yet relatively impotent in action" (p. 118). Bandura (1964) takes exception with the generally held notion that adolescence is a time of rebellion and strife reflected in the adolescent conflict with society in the search for independence and identity. He postulates that that cultural expectations of strife lead the adolescent into rebellious behavior and without such societal expectations the adolescent period would be one of relatively calm development.

Hall's (1978, p.13) categorization of adolescent development into a series of steps confirms the primacy of the psychosocial task of the adolescent:

1. achievement of a social role
2. development of relationships with both sexes

3. acceptance of own physique
4. achievement of emotional independence from parents
5. preparation and development of skills necessary for a career
6. development of intellectual skills for adult competence.

Adolescent development along biological, cognitive and psychosocial paths is manifested by specific behaviors attributed to "teenagers" by themselves and others. Meeker (1979) characterizes the adolescent as

> grouchy, depressed, critical, irritable, tired, weepy, belligerent, self conscious, lazy, rebellious, sex conscious, quiet, proud, stubborn, ugly, unsure, complaining, labile, loud, [driven] to succeed, bossy, atheistic, stoic (p.39).

Personal observation of the researcher indicates that they are preoccupied with how they look, and they worry about their bodies. They may dress alike and listen to the same music yet insist they are different. They may work hard for other people yet loaf at home. They are animated with peers yet daydreaming or sullen with family. They "hang out" together and appear to eat constantly. They do not want to go places with their family. They may be personally immaculate, yet their rooms may be sloppy and/or dirty. At the same time, they may work tirelessly for a cause in which they believe. They may experiment with drugs and alcohol, and if they have a driver's license may take major risks with the automobile. They believe that accidents happen to others. The standard response to criticism or advice is

usually negative. Each of the above personal observations may be linked to the characteristics and behaviors noted by other researchers.

The Gifted Adolescent

The gifted adolescent has the same needs and drives as others of his/her age. However, those factors of intellect and personality that distinguish an adolescent as gifted may also intensify the adolescent developmental experience as it is experienced in western society.

Buescher (1985) has formalized the major issues facing gifted adolescents into six categories:

1. recognition of, acceptance of and conflict over ownership of the gift or talent
2. intrapersonal conflict between personal expectations and the reality of personal performance
3. fear of and decrease in intellectual risk taking to maintain intellectual and social equilibrium
4. interpersonal conflict between the expectations of others and individual needs and aspirations
5. decreased ability to tolerate ambiguity due to intellectual need for clear cut answers to questions
6. premature closure in regard to the career aspects of identity development.

Clark (1984) is more specific when describing particular problems encountered with the gifted adolescent. They may be physically less mature than their classmates, but think more maturely with the usual adolescent interests not pertinent to them. At the same time, the younger gifted person may be intellectually knowledgeable of the adolescent

developmental process, but have lessened emotional ability to understand the processes. The adolescent preoccupation with sports and appearance may lead them to hide their intellect through conforming to group norms or by rebelling. They may have a stronger internal locus of control and independence leading to teacher/student confrontations. On the positive side, they appear to individuate from family with less trauma than the average population.

Manaster and Powell (1983) have constructed a model for both recognizing the problems of gifted adolescents and and placing them in the appropriate psychosocial domain. They believe gifted adolescents are prone to problems because

> they are different and do not fit [out of stage]; they appear different to themselves and to others and can or should not fit [out of phase]; or because they feel they are different, feel they do not fit and accept these conclusions [out of sync] (p.71).

The issues and problems can then be viewed in the cognitive domain as being out of stage, in the social domain as being out of phase and in the psychological domain as out of sync. Cognitive problems may include boredom, under-achievement, and uneven development. Social problems may include alienation due to their divergent thinking process and/or different interests than peers, hypersensitivity to peer indifference when issues of importance to the gifted are brought up for discussion that are not considered

important by age peers, and possible unpopularity due to their need to challenge authority when the authority is in conflict with their own position. Psychological problems may manifest themselves in poor self concept, anxiety, and behaviors reflective of skewed attention to cognitive development at the expense of emotional needs.

On the whole, the gifted adolescent, according to Shepherd (lecture, 1980), moves through life with relatively fewer problems than the average adolescent although when the gifted adolescent does have a problem, it is more severe than the average student due to his/her higher cognitive abilities. Altman (1983) and Delisle (1982) are also concerned with the potential for serious maladjustment in the gifted adolescent population, citing those characteristics that tend to define giftedness as possible factors in the increased incidence of suicide among adolescents and gifted adolescents in particular. Altman stresses however that the current research regarding gifted adolescent suicide is not conclusive and that it tends to support earlier data reflecting superior adjustment on the part of gifted students.

Conclusion

The above discussion indicates that the majority of behaviors/characteristics attributed to adolescents relate

to meeting their psychosocial needs, with a clear understanding that these needs have biological, cognitive,and emotional roots, and while common to all adolescents, may have particular significance for the gifted adolescent. Most gifted adolescents, deal adequately with both their adolescence and their giftedness; some members of the gifted population may have difficulty due to the nature of their giftedness. The psychosocial requirements for healthy adulthood appear to be appropriately framed within the Eriksonian concept of identity development that is discussed in the next section.

Identity Development

Erikson (1968) postulates that the adolescent period is a time during which the young person must accomplish the major task of establishing an identity, which at its optimum

> is experienced merely as a sense of psychosocial well being. It's most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in ones body, a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assurance of anticipated recognition from those who count (p. 165).

"The developmental task is to integrate childhood identifications 'with the basic biological drives, native endowment, and the opportunities offered in social roles'" (1960, p.257). The task involves the discovery of who one is, the roles on will play in life and the career path(s)

one might take. It is during adolescence that ones physical, emotional and cognitive developmental sequences have progressed to the point where the identity question may be overtly raised by the adolescent. The crises that arise at this point have the potential to promote or retard affective growth and development (Erikson, 1968). This development is based not only on one's perception of self but on the sense of self as presented to the individual by family members, peers, and others within the young person's educational and larger communities.

In the Eriksonian model, the task is conceptualized as being accomplished within the context of an eight stage theory of human psychosocial development. The conclusion is based on the success or failure of earlier task completion (See Table 3).

Table 3
Eriksonian Life Stages

Age:	Crisis Resolution	
	Positive	Negative
Infancy	trust	mistrust
Early Childhood	autonomy	shame and doubt
Play age	initiative	guilt
School age	industry	inferiority
Adolescence	identity	identity diffusion
Young adulthood	intimacy	isolation
Adulthood	generativity	self-absorption
Senescence	integrity	disgust

At each stage of development, a crisis arises that must be resolved. According to Erikson (1968), crisis is "...used here in a developmental sense to connote...a turning point, a crucial period of increased vunerability and heightened potential...the source of generational strength and maladjustment" (p. 96).

Erikson postulates that each step in his affective developmental process incorporates and synthesizes the previous steps. The extent to which each previous step has been completed helps to determine the success of the next step. He maintains that there is no "permanent conquering" of each stage of human development, and postulates that outcomes are the result of favorable or negative conditions that may help or hinder the mastery of the developmental task. Erikson is clear in noting the increased impact of the environment and its influence on development as the child approaches adulthood (1960).

> Yet, it is the nature of human life that each succeeding crisis takes place within a widened social radius where an ever-larger number of significant persons have a bearing on the outcome. ...each further stage of growth in a given individual is not only dependent upon the relatively successful completion of his own previous stages, but also on the completion of the subsequent stages in those other individuals with whom he interacts and whom he accepts as models (p. 255).

The earliest glimpse of identity occurs during infancy when a mutual bond of trust and recognition is established between adult and infant.

> Its absence or impairment can dangerously limit the capacity to feel identical when adolescent growth makes it incumbent on the person to abandon childhood and to trust adulthood and with it, the search for self chosen lives and incentives (p. 106).

The toddler task of developing autonomy or independence may be re-enacted during adolescence as delinquency or as self doubt. The cyclical intergenerational nature of developmental relationships plays out here, for the sense of independence in the significant adults' lives will limit or extend the autonomy granted a child.

The preschool child has as his/her task the development of initiative. Through parental relationships, the child begins to develop a conscience and to take the values and actions of the parent into his/her life. The relationship to the adolescent task of identity development lies in the conviction, begun in early childhood, that one is able to live up to one's perceived potential.

A sense of industry or the ability to "make things and make them well" is the school child's task. It is here that the education system enters the child's life. To the extent that it focuses on making things and making them well,

excluding the options of experimentation and risk to fail, its relevance for the adolescent is great. Erikson believes

> for the vast majority of men, in all times, this has been not only the beginning but also the limitation of their identity (p. 127).

As stated earlier, the adolescent task of identity development is perceived by Erikson as a synthesis of all previous processes and is considered a final developmental step before adulthood. Successful resolution of the adolescent crises results in a strong sense of identity; unsuccessful resolution of the crisis results in identity diffusion which is characterized by "a permanent inability to 'take hold'"(p. 257) or the development of a negative identity based on "a devoted attempt to become what parents, class, or community do not want him to be"(p.257).

A small number of studies (Archer, 1982; Meileman, 1979; Munro & Adams, 1977) intimate that for some American adolescents, (a) a "strong" identity crisis does not occur until late adolescence and that (b) identity development is a more gradual process than projected by Erikson and may be only partially completed in the early 20's.

Moratorium

Some adolescents are also characterized by Erikson (1980, 1959) as being in a state of psychosocial moratorium, "a period of delay in the assumption of adult commitment"

(1960, p.263). During this period, the adolescent may need opportunities and experiences not usually found within the parameters of contemporary adolescent life and routine. "Children and adolescents," he says, "in their presocieties provide for one another a sanctioned moratorium and joint support for free experimentation with inner and outer dangers (including those emanating from the adult world)" (p.127).

The moratorium stage ends with the making of a well thought out commitment in regard to appropriate and satisfying intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, career choices and ideological frame of reference. Erikson suggests that for a number of adolescents, commitments are delayed because of an unconscious need to avoid identity foreclosure; he further suggests that the difficult and often painful process involved in a prolonged search for identity may result in a more integrated, full functioning personality. (According to Crain (1985), Erikson himself appeared to experience a lengthy period of moratorium, finding a life direction at the age of 25).

Operationalization of the Eriksonian Model

The notion of crisis resolution is paramount in the Eriksonian model of identity development. Marcia (1966), in a study of 86 male college students, examined the variables

of crisis and commitment as benchmarks of identity development in order to develop, in his words, "the subjects' specific identity status; that is, which of four concentration points along a continuum of ego-identity achievement best characterized him.

The two variables of crisis (the time during which alternatives were considered) and commitments ("the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits") were applied to occupation, religion, and political ideology, consistent with the Eriksonian notion of components of identity development. A semi-structured interview process and a sentence completion process were used to obtain the data which was then analyzed through use of a scoring manual based on Eriksonian theory and an earlier pilot study.

Marcia (1966) developed a four part continuum of behaviors reflective of an adolescent's level of ego identity development, labeling the adolescent as being in a state of a)achievement, b) moratorium, c)identity diffusion and/or d)foreclosure. The identity achiever has been through a crisis, is able to make decisions based on his/her own wants and needs, and can be adaptive to environmental influences. The adolescent in moratorium is in a crisis state and is actively struggling to make commitments. The adolescent in moratorium can best be described as being in process. The

adolescent in identity diffusion may or may not have experienced a crisis, but is not committed to anything. The fourth place on the continuum is allocated to the adolescent in foreclosure. This young person has not been through a crisis but states that he/she is committed to those goals expressed by parent and/or others (See Table 4).

Table 4

The Marcia Model
(Adapted from Hummel and Roselli)

Identity Status	Crisis	Commitment
Identity Achievement	YES	YES
Moratorium	YES	NO
Foreclosure	NO	YES
Identity Diffusion	YES or NO	NO

The worth of this study, according to the author, lies in the description of "individual styles of coping with the psychosocial task of forming an ego identity" (p. 289).

A trio of studies (Archer, 1982; Hummel and Roselli, 1983; Meilman, 1979) confirmed the presence of Marcia's four "identity statuses" within secondary and post-secondary populations. Each of the three studies found "moratoriums" and "identity achievers" to be the older students; however no more than 24% of the 18-year-old population had reached those states. Meilman (1979) indicated that 68% of his 24-

year-olds were in the moratorium or identity achievement categories.

The findings of these studies may be limited due to the following factors; Meilman's study (like Marcia's) was conducted with male secondary school and college bound students, while Hummel and Roselli interviewed female Catholic high school seniors.

In addition to identity status, Hummel and Roselli (1983) also focused on a possible relationship between underachievement and identity status in a sample of 20 female private high school students. They postulated that high achieving female high school students would be either identity achievers or identity forclosers, while the underachieving subject would be a "moratorium" or "diffuser" (whether or not she had experienced a crisis). Adapting the Marcia interview process, they examined the data for identity status in the areas of occupation, religion and peer relationships (dating), and sought to define the relationship between identity status and academic achievement.

Their findings indicated that more than half of the high academic achievers were identity achievers, while only one underachiever had reached that state. Eight of the underachievers were found to be diffusers or foreclosers. There was no significant difference found between groups in

regard to peer relationships or dating. However, none of the academic underachievers were identity achievers in regard to occupational choice. More than half of the underachievers believed their social life was more important than their academic life, leading the authors to state that "the interests of underachievers are more likely to focus on the social relationships in their lives" (p.25). The authors found that the underachievers had not appeared to experience the crises necessary for moratorium and/or identity achievement status, and that the diffuse state appeared to be connected to the plans and philosophies of their families. Hummel and Roselli conclude that the process of working through developmental crises in goals and values had a higher correlation with academic success and identity development than did specific commitments to certain goals and values.

Identity Development and the Gifted

A developmental perspective on gifted adolescence (Monks and van Boxtel, 1985) provides a framework for conceptualizing the specific problems faced by some gifted adolescents as they grow to adulthood. Biological, cognitive and social development, described as taking place within the "universal conditions" of family, peers and school or work environment, interact in five "universal

behavior domains" (attachment, friendship, sexuality, achievement and autonomy) which are incorporated into the term identity. "The prominence in them [behavior domains] of cognitive abilities, creativity, and task commitment has implications for the social interaction of the gifted, and therefore affects their identity formation (p. 278). The problems faced by gifted adolescents due to their quest for identity as presented by Monks and van Boxtel are similar to those presented elsewhere as problems encountered by the adolescent due soley to the giftedness.

Delisle (1985) approaches the issue of identity development and the gifted through the perspective of career and vocational education. He describes some gifted as having "multipotentiality", the ability to perform a variety of tasks well which leads to difficulty in choosing a life career. For some gifted, perfectionism may postpone a career decision leaving the student in a state of moratorium; for others underachievement may leave the student in a state of role diffusion; for yet another group a career is chosen before the student is ready and identity development may be slowed or cut off, leaving the adolescent in a state of foreclosure.

Torrance (1971) states "it would perhaps be conservative to estimate that the gifted person who stops short in

the search for his identity operates at only about one to five percent of his potential"(p. 147). In a 1971 follow-up to a study of more than 200 gifted students, grades 7 through 12, who had been given the Torrance Test of Creativity in 1959, he examined patterns that he had characterized as being common to gifted adolescents in the process of identity development. The three main patterns were conformity, rebellion, and creative individuality, each of which may be found in the common behaviors and characteristics attributed to gifted/talented adolescents, and which correlate to some extent to the personality patterns attributed by Richert (1982) to gifted young people. He also identified a number of students who "stopped short in the search" for their identity, developing a number of physical or social problems. He concludes,

> One thing seems sure. A period of wandering seems necessary. There has to be freedom to wander, to experiment, to risk, to find out what is possible, to discover one's limits and to decide what fits (p. 154).

This conclusion implies agreement with the Eriksonian concept of moratorium as a necessary factor in the process of identity development.

Summary

The manner in which the adolescent is able to tackle the tasks involved in identity development is intertwined with the basic adolescent needs of love, dignity and res-

pect, honest relationships with adults, intimacy, choice and responsibility, meaningful work, and competence and independence. These human needs tend to be reflected in the characteristics and behaviors commonly associated with the adolescent. At the same time, the extent to which these human needs are met will determine in part the identity that will guide and characterize the adolescent and adult. For some adolescents, the dimension of giftedness carries with it both overt and covert attitudes, characteristics and behaviors that also impact on development of identity. The relationship between the adolescent and the greater environments of family, school, and community provide additional data for the young person to process during the years of adolescence.

The Role of the Adolescent in Society

Adolescence was first differentiated as a specific stage of life during the Eighteenth Century (Aries, 1962); the adolescent functioned in that society as a responsible adult. In 1904, Hall, observing that the adolescent years are a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, characterized the adolescent experience as a functional stage in human development based on social perceptions as well as on physiological development (Matter, 1984). Elder (1975) notes that "the social reality of adolescence, its

boundaries, duration and experience are variables in the process of social change, cyclical and evolutionary" (p.1).

It is generally acknowledged today that adolescence is indeed a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, with the age span usually accepted as roughly 13-18. Although specific practices may differ from state to state, voting majority in the United States is attained at the time of the young person's eighteenth birthday, at which time many of the rights and responsibilities of adulthood are assumed.

For many young people, this majority includes and assumes the end of formal education and entry into the job market. For other young people, attaining the age of majority carries relatively little meaning. These young people remain dependent upon family for financial and other support well into their twenties.

One to two hundred years ago, the adolescent was part of a well defined system of family and community. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, society was primarily agrarian. The ability to work as a responsible member of the farm family and community was considered a valuable asset. Education was not compulsory for most young people; secondary and post secondary education was a privilege of the wealthy. Young people formed relationships, married and raised families within their home communities, and remained

within those communities, for the most part, all their lives. Their roles as individuals, family and community members were established before the onset of what is defined as adulthood today.

In retrospect, it appears that role expectations of adolescents in earlier times were clear. The adolescent, due to the nature of his/her society had a specific place within the family structure, had meaningful work within the economic structure, and was expected to develop meaningful relationships with peers and adults at an early age. The lack of ambiguity around one's role in life gave focus and direction to the adolescent. On the other hand, this same lack of ambiguity may have hindered some adolescents in developing an optimum sense of self while the lack of educational opportunities for the less affluent members of society probably denied optimum cognitive development for some.

During the past century, a variety of factors have influenced the period of time devoted to the adolescent experience, including the mechanization of society and lack of meaningful work for youth, the compulsory nature and length of public school education, the amount of time required to prepare for specialized careers, and parental a

societal expectations focused on post secondary education (Elder, 1975).

Key social changes brought about by the rapid growth and development of the western industrial system are evident in the changing nature of family structure. The structural changes have led to Farber's description of today's family as "a set of mutually contingent careers" (Elder, 1975, p.8). Educational change has resulted in responsibility for education of the child moving from family to school; the legal commitment to secondary education combined with lack of work opportunity for the adolescent has promulgated the secondary school as the major social system in which the adolescent develops to maturity (Coleman, 1960; Elder, 1975). "High School," says Sizer (1984), "is a kind of secular church, a place of national rituals that mark stages of a young citizen's life. The value of its rites appears to depend on national consistency" (p. 6). The dominant social system of the adolescent then becomes the school system rather than the family system.

Adolescent Social System

Coleman (1960) has defined the adolescent social system as an adolescent subculture. His examination of this subculture was designed to examine the possible effect of adolescent value systems on education, as well as to point

out the interrelationship of the variety of systems in which adolescents develop their identity. Ten midwestern high schools, ranging in size from 180 students to more than 2,000 students served as the sample.

Boys were asked whether they would rather be remembered as star athlete, brilliant scholar or most popular. Girls were asked whether they wanted to be remembered as leaders of activities, brilliant scholars, or most popular. All males wanted to be remembered as athletes; the female students were divided between leader and most popular. The addition of two preparatory schools to the sample found those students, in a minor way, wanted to be remembered as scholars. A major conclusion of the study indicated that the most intelligent students in the sample were probably not achieving to potential; rather they were choosing the values of their peers when making decisions about their roles in school. Coleman then stated that those students who were perceived as being the academically able may in fact have a lesser ability than those who are not achieving to potential.

Further exploration of the emphasis on athletic ability led to the discovery that both the school and community systems in which these young people lived placed high importance and value on athletics. Intermural competition was important to all schools except the two preparatory schools

where academic excellence was admired to a limited extent. The second major finding of his study indicated that the extent to which a particular type of accomplishment is valued by school and community will become a factor in determining goals and values of the adolescent student.

The Adolescent as Student

A major role played by the adolescent in today's society is that of student. According to Muus (1970):

> It is known that the period of adolescence is also expanding upward in that modern industrialized and computerized society requires increasingly more education thus prolonging the period of dependency and immaturity which the status of being a minor and being a student implies (p. 60).

Education is compulsory until the age of 16; many students graduate from secondary school at the age of 18, spending their official years of adolescence as students. The nature of the educational system fosters continuation of the student role outside of the school setting through its model of in-school and out-of-school work and homework. Meaningful work is difficult to obtain and relationships with adult others may be difficult to develop. The student relies primarily on other students as role models. At the same time, an important part of the developmental process is driven by the adolescent's need to feel that (a) there is meaningful work in one's life, (b) one is competent in one

or more areas of ones life and (c) one is able to relate in a healthy manner with others. This process is played out for many adolescents as previously mentioned, within the social system of the public secondary school.

The Gifted Student

The student who possesses gifts/talents significantly above the norm has been defined in the previous literature review by the United States Office of Education (Marland, 1972) as follows:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts (p. 10).

The public school system of the United States is designed to meet the needs of the "average" child, and according to White (1985), does this quite well. However, it is also designed to house and teach all children. Although Public Law # 94-142 has provided for some children with special needs, it does not provide for those children whose special needs are those engendered by the possession

of gifts/talents significantly above the norm. Newland (1976) has found that

> the manner in which and the extent to which the gifted have been recognized as important to this country's society were discernibly different, both explicitly and implicitly, in early colonial days, in the early industrialization era and just after the flight of the first Sputnik (p. 4).

At the same time, Tannenbaum (1979) notes that "the cyclical nature of interest in the gifted is probably unique in American education. No other special group of children has been alternately embraced and repelled with so much vigor by educators and laymen alike"(p. 5). The lack of government mandated services for the gifted at this time appears to be bound in the American cultural and philosophical conflict between elitism and egalitarianism (Gallagher, 1975; Newland, 1976).

Some gifted/talented students succeed within the public school system. Some, capable of outstanding achievement (usually reflected in grades, awards, honors, and offices), do not achieve to their potential, even though their grades may be outstanding. These students may be defined as underachieving gifted students by virtue of ability not measurable by current standards.

Other gifted students show marked discrepancies between measurable tests of ability or achievement and report card

grades. Such students may receive grades substantially lower than those predicted by standardized tests; some of these students may fail one or more subjects. While a student may be labeled as an underachiever in the early grade school years, the situation may not be directly confronted by student, parent, and educational system until the latter years of secondary school when decisions are being made in regard to further education and/or career choice. It is at this time that education and/or career choices may appear limited due to the gifted student's academic underachievement. Decisions made or not made at this time may carry life-long consequences for the gifted adolescent. The researcher is conceptualizing confrontation (or lack thereof) around this issue as one step in the identity development process for some gifted adolescent academic underachievers.

Summary

Three major orientations of the gifted as identified by Newland (1976) include "the needs of the gifted for self actualization, society's needs for their contributions and the educational provisions that should be made for them" (p.6). Each orientation has been discussed in the preceding review. The available literature/research on the gifted and the gifted underachiever does speak to the self, the

educational system and to the greater community when discussing some factors involved in both giftedness and underachievement. It does not appear to speak clearly to the process of identity development as it impacts the gifted student, nor does it speak clearly to the apparent contradictions found by some researchers regarding the self concept of the gifted underachiever. The question remains: Why do some gifted students achieve and some either fail or not reach potential as defined by society and the educational system?

Research Questions

As stated in the introduction, a small body of data presents a picture of the gifted adolescent academic underachiever, consistent with the researcher's experience and pilot study that is contradictory to the dominant literature. This picture, when placed within the framework described above and coupled with the apparent lack of information in the underachiever's own words presents a series of questions for the researcher:

1. How do gifted/talented adolescent academic underachievers perceive themselves?

2. How do gifted adolescent academic underachievers perceive their academic underachievement?

3. To what extent is the adolescent's perception similar to or different from that of the literature?

4. Are there identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?

5. If so, (a) what are those patterns, and (b) what is the role played by academic underachievement?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter is divided into four sub-sections: sampling, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis.

Sampling

Consistent with the thrust of the research questions, the key population to be examined consists of gifted, adolescent, academic underachieving adolescents. However, in order to develop more comprehensive answers to Research Questions 4 and 5, two comparison populations have been sampled as described below.

Core Sample

The core sample consists of eleven adolescent students between the ages of 13 and 18 in their junior or senior year in public, regional or comprehensive high schools who have been identified by appropriate criteria as both gifted and underachieving.

A target number of eleven has been selected because "a study that probes deeply into the characteristics of a small sample often provides more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problem by collecting only shallow information on a large sample" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p.261).

Students in their junior and senior years of high school are faced with choices around career and future education that may be directly related to their academic underachievement. The sample has been drawn from the populations of two public high schools in the State of New Hampshire. Public high schools in New Hampshire draw their students from a variety of social, cultural, economic, and academic backgrounds, providing á heterogeneous target group. The use of more than one school system will "allow one to look simultaneously at several settings and to get enough variability to increase the explanatory power of the study as a whole" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.37).

The school systems selected have identified their gifted students during the elementary school and/or middle school years through the use of multiple criteria developed and implemented by the individual school. The gifted underachievers were also identified through use of multiple criteria including a group or individual IQ score of 125+ and failure in one or more courses, or a tenth or eleventh grade year average of below 80%. Subjects were obtained from a pool generated by the administration, guidance department and teaching staff of two regional public high schools in New Hampshire.

The intent of the study was discussed with high school personnel prior to subject selection. A meeting was held

with appropriate subjects to determine student interest in the project. A letter was sent to subjects' parents to explain the project, to obtain their cooperation and to obtain their consent for student participation when necessary since some students were under the age of 18 (See Appendix A). In addition, all subjects signed an "informed consent" prior to participation in the study (See Appendix B). Since seventy five percent of gifted academic underachievers are males, the sample population includes approximately three males for every female.

Comparison Samples

Two comparison populations are included in the study for purposes of data triangulation. The first population is the three students from the researcher's pilot study. These students have been selected because they are now young adults and their current perceptions may offer additional insight into the phenomenon. The second comparison population consists of six highly successful middle-aged adults who initially identified themselves through informal conversation with the researcher as having been gifted and underachieving when in high school and/or college and who now perceive themselves as successful in the business or professional world. The middle-aged adults' perceptions of their giftedness was verified through administration of the

Raven Progressive Matrices (revised order 1956), a non-verbal, untimed test "designed to assess mental ability by requiring examinee to solve problems presented in abstract figures and designs" (Richert, et.al., 1982).

Their perceptions of their academic underachievement and its relationship to their current self concept will be used as both a source of patterns and themes and a cross check of the patterns and themes that emerge from other samples.

Instrumentation

Five instruments have been developed for this study: a detailed standard open-ended interview guide for the adolescent sample (Appendix C), a standard open-ended interview guide for the young adult sample (Appendix D), a general interview guide for the middle-aged adult sample (Appendix E), a demographic questionnaire for the adolescent sample (Appendix F), and a common demographic questionnaire for the young adult and middle-aged adult samples (Appendix G).

Detailed Interview Guide for the Adolescent Sample

The researcher's experience with adolescents has indicated to her that an appropriate means of eliciting information from them about perceptions is through conversation. One form of conversation is the interview whose

purpose is "to find out what is in and on someone else's mind . . . to access the perspective of the person being interviewed . . . to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, p. 196). Therefore, the interview is the instrument of choice for this study as an appropriate means of gathering student perceptions.

The use of more than one site for data collection and the current lack of uniformity in definition, identification and approach to gifted academic underachievement constitute bases for using a standardized open-ended interview. A standardized open-ended interview "minimize[s] issues of legitimacy and credibility by carefully collecting the same information from everyone who is interviewed" (Patton, p. 203), regardless of the environmental, identification, or intervention variables. However, provision does need to be made to address those questions and concerns that might be spontaneously brought up by students as they answer the designated questions. When a spontaneously asked question bore fruit and was applicable to other subjects it was incorporated into the interview form. At the end of the interview process, those students who did not have the opportunity to respond to such questions were re-interviewed to maintain the credibility of the process.

To obtain as complete a picture as possible of the gifted adolescent who is an academic underachiever and to explore a possible relationship between underachievement and identity, the interview questions have been organized around five topic areas related to adolescent needs and the task of identity development: the students' perceptions and evaluations of their competency, the students' perceptions and evaluations of their identity, the students' perceptions and evaluations of their academic competence, the students' perceptions and evaluations of both their personal academic purpose and their position regarding the purpose of their school, and the relationship of life experiences to educational and personal identity and self-esteem (See Appendix C).

Each of the five areas has grown out of a concern or issue raised by the five research questions of the study. The relationship between the research questions and the interview categories is shown in Table 5.

The specific interview questions are a modification of the interview questions asked by the researcher during a pilot study for this project. In addition, the questions in Category 1 (Perception of Competency) are an expansion of interview questions used by Robertson and Hansen (1979) as part of an admission process of students into a summer program for gifted middle school students, adapted from

Table 5

Relationship of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Question # 1
How do gifted/talented adolescent academic underachievers perceive themselves?

	Interview Category
Category 1.	Perceptions of Competency
Category 2.	Perceptions of Self
Category 3.	Perceptions of Academic Competence
Category 5.	Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity

Research Question # 2
How do gifted adolescent academic underachievers perceive their academic underachievement?

	Interview Category
Category 1.	Perceptions of Competency
Category 2.	Perceptions of Self
Category 3.	Perceptions of academic competence
Category 4.	Perceptions of academic purpose
Category 5.	Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity

Research Question # 3
To what extent is the adolescent's perception similar to or different from that of the literature?

	Interview Category
Category 1.	Perceptions of Competency
Category 2.	Perceptions of Self
Category 3.	Perceptions of academic competence
Category 4.	Perceptions of academic purpose
Category 5.	Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity

Research Question # 4

Are there identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

	Interview Category
Category 1.	Perceptions of Competency
Category 2.	Perceptions of Self
Category 3.	Perceptions of Academic Competence
Category 4.	Perceptions of Academic Purpose
Category 5.	Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity

Research Question # 5

If so, (a) what are those patterns and (b) what is the role played by academic underachievement?

	Interview Category
Category 1.	Perceptions of Competency
Category 2.	Perceptions of Self
Category 3.	Perceptions of Academic Competence
Category 4.	Perceptions of Academic Purpose
Category 5.	Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity

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interview questions designed by Stuart and Towne (1977, unpublished) for a summer program serving high school gifted students. The questions in Category 5 (Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity) are derived from an autobiographical questionnaire developed by Stuart and Towne(1977) for a high school summer gifted program and adapted by Robertson and Hansen (1979) for a middle school summer gifted program.

Interview Guide for Young Adult Sample

The standardized open-ended interview is the instrument of choice for the young adult sample. Rationale for use of this instrument and conditions surrounding the interview process are the same as for the core sample.

The interview guide for the young adult sample was developed after the core sample had been interviewed. The young adult interview questions evolved from preliminary study of core sample responses which revealed that major issues facing the adolescent gifted underachiever appeared to be (a) those concerned with personal growth and development, (b) unclear vision of future career path(s), and (c) uncertainty as to the relevance of the public school curriculum and design to their lives.

The interview questions fell into five broad categories: (1) perceptions of high school years, (2) perceptions of current status, (3) perceptions of self during the period of young adulthood, (4) perceptions of future status, as they look to full adulthood, and (5) perceptions of the role of underachievement in personal and educational life (See Appendix D).

Relationship of Research Questions and Interview Questions for the Young Adult Sample

Each of the five categories of interview questions has been developed to obtain triangulating data to respond to the concerns and issues raised by research questions four and five.

Research Question #4

Are there identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?

Research Question # 5

If so, (a) what are those patterns and (b) what is the role played by academic underachievement?

Interview Guide for Middle-Aged Sample

The interview is the process of choice with the middle aged adult sample. However, the specific process is changed from that of a standardized open-ended interview to the more general interview guide. This approach, according to Patton (1980)

> involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. The issues in the outline need not be taken in any particular order and the actual working of questions to elicit responses about those issues is not determined in advance. The interview guide simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all the relevant topics are covered (p.198).

Paton (1980) provides a rationale for use of the interview guide by saying that

> the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously,... but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (p.200).

Conditions surrounding the interview process remain the same as for the core sample.

The interview guide for the middle-aged adult sample was developed during the study after the core and young adult samples had been interviewed. The interview guide was designed to explore three major periods of the subjects' lives; their adolescence (high school years), their early adulthood (college and armed forces years), and their prime adulthood (career years), and to examine the role of underachievement in any or all of these phases of their lives (See Appendix D).

A series of questions, based on the five topic areas generated for the core sample and the five categories of perceptions of the young adult sample, was included under each general heading to assist the researcher in obtaining pertinent information, if such was not forthcoming from the interview process.

Similarities and differences between the reflections of the older group when combined with the perceptions of the young adults and core sample will provide data to identify possible patterns of identity development common to some gifted adolescents in which underachievement played an identifiable role.

Relationship of Research Questions and Interview Guide for Middle-Aged Sample

Each of the three topic areas has been developed to obtain triangulating data to respond to the concerns and issues raised by research questions four and five.

Research Question #4

Are there identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?

Research Question #5

If so, (a) what are those patterns and (b) what is the role played by academic underachievement?

Demographic Questionnaires

The demographic questionnaire for the adolescent sample is shown in Appendix E. The demographic questionnaire for the young adult and the middle-aged samples is shown in Appendix F.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected by means of interviews and questionnaires. An opportunity was given for further inquiry/dialogue on any question the interviewer and respondent deemed appropriate. As necessary, the additional questions were incorporated into following interviews. The interviewer gave the respondent wide latitude for elaboration as she/he desired.

A group meeting was held with the core sample before the interviews to address the purpose of the project, to inform them of any possible risk from participation in the project, to distribute the questionnaire, and to address any concerns of the students. It represented an initial attempt to develop trust between the subjects and the researcher. This trust is important due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions. The comparison sample populations were not seen as a group in order to facilitate their anonymity and to accommodate their busy schedules.

All interviews were taped in single sessions (with one exception, a double session) with individual participants. The interviews were conducted in an informal setting determined by researcher and subjects. The subjects were guaranteed the right not to answer any question asked. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by the researcher. Anonymity was stressed and maintained with each subject. The complete transcripts were seen only by the researcher and the interviewee involved. Names and other identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the respondents. The dissertation and any other publication resulting from the dissertation will be made available to the subject(s).

A second group meeting of the core sample was held following the interviews to answer any additional questions,

to discuss the process of the interviews, and to collect the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the data analysis is to provide answers to the research questions. There are a variety of ways to organize data for analysis; this study first analyzes the data according to the five interview categories and then uses this interview analysis to answer the research questions.

Interview Category Analysis

The interview questions that provide the majority of the data are grouped into five broad categories (See Appendix B). The use of these five major categories provides the researcher with a prearranged system of data coding. Each set of responses within its general category becomes a main category of information to be coded, and each question within a particular set of questions becomes a property of that category (Glaser and Straus, 1967).

The primary sources for the data analysis are those questions generated by the researcher as the interviews take place and from "insights and interpretations that emerge during data collection" (Patton, p. 297). These data take the form of direct quotes as well as inferences drawn from

the interviews. The process is primarily inductive even though a preliminary coding system is in place due to the structure of the interview. Statistical data on each student will be included when pertinent.

Student responses to each category of questions were grouped together. Memos were written at that time for each general category. A memo is "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (Glaser, 1978). The same process was followed for the individual questions answered by the students within each of the five general categories of questions.

These sets of material were then summarized individually in memos in accordance with the advice of Miles and Huberman (1984):

> "Memos are always conceptual in intent. They do not just report data, but they tie different pieces of data together in a cluster, or they show that a particular piece of data is an instance of a general concept" (Miles & Huberman, p. 69).

The memos were set aside for a brief period of time, then reviewed for emerging themes, patterns, and trends.

> There is a lot to say for not tackling analysis immediately. You can distance yourself from the details of the field work and get a chance to put relationships between you and subjects in perspective. You will get a new enthusiasm for the data that may have become boring. Also, you get a chance to read and mull over other ideas (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982, p.155).

The interrelationships among the five clusters of material were then analyzed in the same manner for themes, patterns, and trends. The sets of responses of the two groups of students were also compared for similarities and differences between their responses.

Answering the Research Questions

The data analysis from the interviews was used to answer each of the specific research questions of the study.

Research Question #1 (How do gifted/talented adolescent academic underachievers perceive themselves?) was addressed directly from the memos that were developed from the interview data collected and analyzed as described. The memos contain the students' own words in the form of quotations. Memos, summaries of data, and questionnaire material provided documentation for this question.

Research Question #2 (How do gifted adolescent academic underachievers perceive their academic underachievement?) was answered in the same manner as research question #1.

Research Question #3 (To what extent is the adolescent's perception similar to or different from that of the literature?) was answered through comparison of the adolescents' perspectives of underachievement as analyzed in the previous section with the appropriate gifted underachievement literature. The use of existing literature provided an

additional data source to compare emerging themes, patterns, and trends with those studied by previous researchers.

Research Question #4 (Are there identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?) addressed clusters of perceptions and behaviors of the subjects plus their perceived reactions of others. It was anticipated that both common identity development patterns and the role played by underachievement in those patterns would emerge from the data.

The theoretical findings pertinent to this question were triangulated with data from two additional groups. The original pilot study group of three was asked for their current perceptions of their particular academic underachievement and its relationship to their current lives. In addition, a group of six mature, high achieving adults who perceive themselves as having been gifted academic underachievers during their adolescence were asked to reflect on their experiences. Similarities and differences between reflections of the two older groups and the perceptions of the core sample population provided data to identify possible patterns of identify development common to some gifted adolescents in which underachievement plays an identifiable role. The analysis process was essentially the

same as that followed during the first portion of the data analysis.

Research Question #5 (If so, (a) what are those patterns and (b) what is the role played by academic underachievement?) was answered by comparing the findings from research question #4, the findings from the interview questions, and a comparison of the students' perceptions about their underachievement with the literature. The results of these comparisons were used to generate hypotheses and theory regarding the phenomenon of gifted adolescent underachievement.

Limitations of the Study

Appropriate caution will be explicitly exercised in generalizing the results of this study. However,in addition to the small, homogeneous, sample size, two other sampling decisions need to be kept in mind. Although two comparison adolescent samples were included, no adolescents were interviewed who were either gifted and academically achieving or who were not gifted and were either academically achieving or not achieving. The successful middle-aged subjects were chosen because of their career success and their self perception of being both gifted and underachieving in high school; there were no middle-aged, unsuccessful adults who had described themselves as gifted and underachieving in

high school, nor were there successful or unsuccessful middle-aged subjects who had described themselves as not being gifted during their high school years.

With the above caveat in mind, the ideas generated as a result of the findings of the study may be viewed as implications for further study in the field of gifted academic underachievement. "Findings are soon forgotten, but not ideas. The conceptual level of good ideas transcends the data also by going beyond it in use and time" (Glaser, 1978, p.8).

CHAPTER 4

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This chapter is divided into five main sections, one for each of the research questions. The answers to the first three questions were derived from the data obtained from the adolescent, secondary school sample. The preliminary answer to Research Question #4 was also obtained from the adolescent sample. The final answer to Research Question #4 and the answer to Research Question #5 was obtained through analysis of the adolescent data combined with the perceptions of the young adult sample and the middle-aged adult sample.

The answer to Research Question #5 is subdivided into four parts; (a) analysis of data from the young adult sample, (b) analysis of data from the middle-aged sample, (c) cross sample analysis of the three groups of subjects, and (d) the conclusion(s) drawn from comparison of the initial answer(s) to Research Question #4 and the cross sample analysis of the three groups of subjects.

Research Question # 1
How do Gifted/Talented Adolescent Academic Underachievers Perceive Themselves?

Analysis of the data pertaining to Research Question #1 is based on the Purkey (1970) model of self. He addresses the self in terms of a core set of beliefs one holds about one's self; these beliefs evolve from the roles and characteristics one attributes to one's self and to the value, positive or negative, placed on each role and its accompanying characteristics.

A major question asked each subject was "Who are you?" The answer to this question was labeled the core statement of self. Responses to the remaining questions then defined the characteristics, attributes, and roles which are contained within the major statement of self. The interview questions for the adolescent sample that provided the data were contained in Category 1 (Perceptions of Competence) and Category 2 (Perceptions of Self). (See Appendix C).

The data fell into three main categories: emotions or feelings, behaviors or characteristics, and competencies. Two additional but minor categories of response were labeled socioeconomic status and physical status. Competency data appeared to fall within the five arenas of giftedness as defined by the United States Office of Education (general

intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative and/or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts), plus the three additional arenas of psychosocial competency, athletic ability, and competency in the workplace. The interview questions in Categories 1 and 2 asked the subjects for their perceptions regarding the way in which their families, peers, teachers and employers (when applicable) view them. The subjects also indicated, by their responses to the research questions,that they played a variety of roles, including family member (either child, sibling or grandchild), peer, student, worker, and briefly for one subject, "significant other."

Subject Presentation

Two of the subjects described themselves as average. "I kind of look at myself as an average person, sorta going along with everyone else. I try to be original and individual; it's difficult sometimes." RM2 began to talk about his competency areas by saying, "I don't know. I've never thought of it." He then said, "I can work on something well for a short period of time depending on how interested I am in it." During this portion of the interview, he could not be specific as to actual competencies. However, later on, during a discussion of meaningful activities in his life, he said that skiing was important to him. He characterized

himself as "a bright kid," having a little trouble in school who could do better if he wanted to. He perceived this characterization to be the way his parents and teachers would see him. When asked if he was in agreement with this particular perception he responded in a low tone, "You always like people to look better at you than they do. I'm not real upset about it. It doesn't bother me." He felt that his peers would characterize him as "interesting" and agreed with that perception.

"I'm just the average person; someone who's trying to get [their] life in order," said CM3. This subject defined himself as a twin and a person who was stereotyped, unfairly on occasion, due to his home address. He was proud of his competency in tennis; a sport his grandfather had taught him. He believes he has a few good friends rather than many acquaintances. He states that he likes to have a good time and to be with his friends and that he is "a caring person." He is an angry person due to the stereotyping and due to the fact that he was cut from the tennis team because of his poor grades. His teachers, he feels, perceive him as someone who has potential, can do the work but won't. He states that he is angry and "mad at myself" because he wants to prove that he can do it (the work). On the other hand, he does not think that others' perceptions of himself are

totally accurate because "they can't know what I'm thinking."

A third subject, CM1, responded, "Me. Me. Just myself. I've never tried to classify myself." He then went on to a discussion of classification and stereotyping, referring once to others stereotyping him as a "weird punk rocker" due to his appearance. He did not elaborate on this perception of himself. CM1 is one of two subjects who referred to his need for physical activity. "Without it," he said, drawing his hand across his throat, "I'm wasted." He can sit when he is "just thinking" but otherwise he says that he fidgets and drums his fingers on his desk. He also indicated that he is younger than most of his friends. When asked about competencies, he responded, "I can't think of anything. I've never thought of any one thing." He then went on to talk about his ability and love of skateboarding, silkscreening, and art. In addition he plays two instruments, although he is not in band or orchestra in the school. Skateboarding, he said, "uses up my energy" and later on, "gets out my aggression." He thinks his teachers think of him as "weird" although the accuracy of that "depends, obviously by their standards, yes. But what I would consider weird, others would consider--I don't know." He also indicated his awareness of his intellectual ability

and his lack of performance in school by saying, "They know I'm not stupid and they know I'm not working."

CM2 asked to have the tape turned off so he could have time to think about his answer to the question, "who are you?" He then said, "I am unsure about the future for myself and the entire world. I would say that I'm neither pessimistic nor optimistic; that I hope for the best but expect the worst. That's the only thing I can think of right now to describe myself." He also described himself as being a competent and constant reader because "reading allows you to communicate fully with another person." He defines himself as a competent test taker and logical thinker. He characterizes himself as being a quiet person, not talkative, one who thinks before he speaks. He states that he has a weird sense of humor, "kind of interesting, but not a lot of fun to be around because I don't think slapstick is funny." In regard to what others think of him, he said that "it doesn't matter what [John Doe] thinks of me as long as what [he] thinks is correct, just, and accurate."

RM4 was silent before answering. Then he said, slowly, "Someone looking for happiness; trying to please others which is part of what makes me happy. It seems it is a goal in itself. I ask myself, "What's the point of [we're] being alive?; you have to work it out for yourself as an indi-

vidual--find out for yourself. I'm just another human being that's surviving. Yeah--I just try to find enjoyment, help others, or find other means of self fulfillment."

Initially, he hesitated to describe himself in terms of competencies. "I'm not really sure. There's a bunch of things I do well, not any one of them the best." He feels that his competencies include swimming, the independent study of history, and his ability to relate to others. "I see and visualize their point of view and can sympathize." Yet he went on to say that he does have some difficulty in communicating with his employer because they have nothing in common.

He also thinks that he is bright and that he has potential. Toward the end of the interview he remembered that music is also an area in which he is competent, saying, "how could I forget that--it's really important to me." He characterizes himself as an "open minded person" who is pursuing "the ultimate goal of being a well rounded person." He goes on to say that he "always make sure I know what other people think of me" and that he has learned not to make snap judgments of others. He is a person who has a "drive to do one thing, then that changes" and he goes on to something else, but tries to maintain a balance. He states that he doesn't interact a great deal with his family yet feels the intensity of his family situation. He is disappointed in himself

because he knows that he isn't doing was well as he should in school.

Another subject (RM3) stated, "I am...two conflicting opinions...within the universe I am nothing, a tiny speck in the whole universe, but in a different way I am the whole universe because what I perceive as my universe makes me different than other people." And then he said a while later, "I dón't think I'm that close to what I am."

He listed a variety of areas in which he perceives himself to be competent. "Finding out things" is one area. He developed a mathematical theory on his own, "although I did it a thousand years too late." He reads and comprehends 1500 words a minute and said he sees pages "like a holograph." He "extrapolates a lot of stuff that will happen in the future" and considers thinking about the future a competency. Specific areas of competence include, math theory, computer skills, and skills in role playing games. He feels powerful when he is involved in role playing games and acknowledges that power is important to him.

He characterizes himself as a good test taker, a "wicked procrastinator", and impulsive. "I have impulses, act a lot, may act like a 7 year old one day, do crazy off the wall things. He agrees with what he considers his parents' perceptions of him to be (lazy, self indulgent,

mentally alert, and intelligent) and with his friends' perceptions (egotistic, power hungry) although later he says that his perceptions and theirs may or may not be congruent. "If they believe one way and I believe another then they're both right. [They're] accurate for what they're needed for because they're a reality."

Three subjects perceived themselves primarily in terms of roles, competencies, and characteristics.

"I'm CM4" he said, "and I'm what I said earlier." Earlier, he had described himself as a musician, a recreational athlete, a team athlete and a smart person. He also described himself as someone who hates sitting at a desk. He went on to describe himself as someone who "when I do something I like to be able to use it with something else...I like to see application." He also said that he does not like doing the same thing over and over again and that "I don't like doing things people tell me I have to do." He characterizes himself as someone who reads (with a book inside his text) instead of doing homework. When asked how he felt about the perceptions he thought others held about him (procrastinating, lazy, sloppy), he first said, "I don't care what a lot of people think about me," but followed it by saying "I take things more seriously than they think."

"I'm me," said RF2 with a laugh, twisting her new engagement ring around her finger. She went on to say, unlike CM1, "I could describe myself as a being, but generally, I'm me." After a silence of several minutes she continued, "I'm me the waitress, the underachiever, me the person wishing I could do better, . . ., me trying to be responsible, me under a lot of pressure to be responsible, hold a job, and finish school. I'm me, trying to do a lot of things for a lot of people besides myself." She perceives herself as an open person and one who still "has a lot to learn about being a grownup." She considers it important to please her parents. She describes her self as a "goof-off because I'm a procrastinator. It's very hard for me to do anything long term. I live day by day mostly. I don't think ahead that much." However, she perceives herself as a responsible person at work because "work is a completely different thing; a part of life, real life. That's part of growing up; that's supporting yourself. She defined herself several times in terms of her job competency and said that "money is more important to me than school."

She perceived a major competency to be her ability to get along with other people and said that she had yet to find someone she could not get along with. Additional competencies included vocal and instrumental music, facility

with language, and art. Her satisfaction with any of these competencies would depend on how successful she was in any of them.

RF1 perceived her major competencies to be her independence and her ability to work. In response to the question of others' perceptions of her competency areas, she replied, "Nobody's really ever told me anything." She has completed a number of woodworking projects which she discussed with the researcher and which she showed to the researcher. At no time during the interview did she state that this was a competency. She did say about one completed project, "I felt good about that." When asked "Who are you?", she was quiet. Then, looking down at the tape recorder she said softly, "I guess that's what I would have to say; independent, pretty much take care of myself. I don't like to rely on other people." She contradicted this statement to some extent when she acknowledged her extreme homesickness whenever she left her family for a period of time.

Although unemployed at present due to automobile problems, she states that she is basically self supporting. She characterized herself as one who is easy to get along with and one who, when she has a problem, doesn't take it out on everybody. She said that she behaved differently in different classes. Depending on the teacher, she might or might not ask for help if she doesn't understand the sub-

ject matter. When asked how she felt about her perceptions of herself, she replied "Good." A long silence followed.

CF1, the tenth subject, replied simply, "I don't know. A bored person." Later on she said, "I'm basically lazy." When asked to speak to competencies, she giggled before saying "Nothing. I watch TV real well. Oh--probably read or something." She reads because it is "more interesting." Other competencies include ice skating and drawing, primarily pen and ink. In addition she believes she is someone to whom friends can confide their problems and troubles, a psychosocial competency. She spoke at length about her friends rather than herself and said that she is older than many of her friends, that they are "in between my sister and me." She appeared knowledgeable about the juvenile justice system, particularly as it pertains to those adolescents who "fall between the cracks." She spoke at length about her friends and a variety of serious personal, family, and school situations in which they found themselves while not speaking to her own situation. She characterizes herself as a responsible person in her mother's eyes (she is responsible for supervising her younger sisters after school and for a variety of household tasks) and as an irresponsible person in her father's eyes (she avoids contact with him; the parents are divorced). She views herself as a respon-

sible person who does not play truant although a number of her friends do. She believes her teachers view her as a non-participant because she does not talk in class. She admits that she is a quiet person in class but says it is "because I just don't like where I am."

She is in counseling because the guidance counselor thinks she is depressed; her parents concur. She did not say at any time that she was depressed. However when asked how the counseling was helping she responded, "I don't know. I've only been going about a month and a half."

The eleventh respondent, RM1, couched his answer in the future tense. Preliminary conversation discovered him to be in agreement with CF1 in that he is bored. He feels "trapped" in his home state and wants to have "exciting experiences." However, when asked to define who he was, he replied, "I don't know. I have to think about it. My view is of what I want to be . . . more of a kind of a person than a job. I want to be independent of a profession; part of what I want to be is someone who is more than just a job. It points in . . . that's a direction at least."

His perception of himself evolved through his description of his behaviors and characteristics. He wants first hand experiences; he can entertain himself and not feel alone. He indicated that he is a resourceful person: "Maybe growing up in this state because I was limited made me

develop interests better. Although I may not have been all that happy all my life, it was maybe a developing process." An example of his resourcefulness may be seen in the fact that he dropped out of high school mid-year of his senior year, negotiated with the state authorities to take the Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED) out of time sequence, and subsequently enrolled in the Continuing Education division of a 4 year accredited college, taking 2 courses.

He went on to say that he was shy and felt rejected in elementary school, partly because of his socioeconomic status, but that he now feels others respect him. He also sees himself as a person who "gets into one thing for a little while and [doesn't] do anything else, and then I totally brush it off and go on to something else."

He perceives himself as smart and as an "interesting person" to some teachers, while to others he is a "trouble-maker and agitator." He attributes this to his ability to free associate, to come up with ideas that use imagination and are exciting.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in the following manner. The core perception of self was considered first. It was followed by an analysis of four response categories; a) socioeconomic status, b) physical status, c) emotional or feeling responses, and d) behaviors and characteristics. Competency data was considered apart from the other four response categories due to the number of components (general intellectual ability, specific academic ability, creative and productive thinking, visual and performing arts, athletics, leadership and psychosocial abilities, and work skills). Role data was analyzed in terms of peer, student, family member and worker roles.

Core Statement of Self

Comparison of the eleven responses to the question "Who are you?" revealed three general modes by which these gifted students perceive themselves. The first perceptual mode focused on an evolving sense of self ("within the universe, I am, nothing, . . . but in a different way I am the whole universe"); the second set of perceptions of self focused on external competencies or roles to define the self (a musician, a worker); the third mode appeared to be one of uncertainty as to the sense of self ("I don't know"). The

patterns or modes of perception appear to occur on a continuum; some students appear to be in transition from one mode to another (See Table 6).

Table 6
Core Sense of Self

Group A Evolving	Group B External	Group C Undecided	Group D Transition
RM1	RF2	CF1	RF1
RM3	CM1	CM3	CM3
RM4	CM4	CF1	
CM2		RM2	

Evolving Definition of Self

This group of students (Group A) is all male and includes subjects RM1, RM3, RM4, and CM2. They appear to be actively seeking a means of defining themselves, both individually and in a larger world view. Their responses, "I am unsure about the future for myself and the entire world " (CM2), "Someone looking for happiness . . . you have to work it out for yourself" (RM4), " a tiny speck in the universe, but . . . the whole universe" (RM3), and "my view is of what I want to be . . . more of a kind of a person" (RM1) appear to reflect a conceptual view of their selves and articulate the process they are going through in order to define themselves. RM1 prefaced his statement of self by saying, "I don't know. I have to think about it." After reflection, he

voiced his perception of himself in the future as an evolving person who is not limited in definition by career. This is different from the responses of some members of Group C which also began with "I don't know" but which had little or no additional input.

External Definition of Self

Group B includes students RF2, CM1, and CM4. They define themselves as entities; "Me, just me" (CM1), "I'm me" (RF2), and "I'm CM4." They tend to perceive themselves in terms of either their competencies or roles they play; weird punk rocker (CM1), musician and athlete (CM4), or waitress and underachiever (RF2). RF2 might be said to be in transition from this mode to an internal mode of perception through recognition of the fact that she is attempting to "do a lot of things for a lot of people besides myself".

Undecided Sense of Self

This group of students includes CF1, CM3, RF1, and RM2. Group C students appear to be groping for a means by which to identify themselves. CF1 said that she did not know who she was--"bored, I guess." RM2 defined himself as average and was unable to identify competency areas until late in the interview when he spoke about skiing. RM2 is also the youngest of the subjects. RF1 is included in this group

because she appeared unable to articulate specific competencies even though they were discussed, and because she said that she had never been told of any competencies. She did define herself as independent and as a worker, perhaps the beginning of a transition to a competency defined perception of self. CM3 may also be in a state of transition. He, along with RM2, said that he was average and was also trying to get his life in order. He did perceive himself as competent in the sport of tennis but had been cut from the team due to poor grades.

Response Category Data

Data from the subsections of the main question were also analyzed in terms of the three main response categories: emotions, behaviors or characteristics, and competencies, and the minor response category--socioeconomic and physiological data. The competency response category will be considered separately.

Socioeconomic Data

Socioeconomic data as subjects referred to it directly during the interviews included RM1's reference to feeling poor as a young child and CM3's anger at being stereotyped due to his rural address. RF2, RM3, RM4, and CF1 all mentioned family stress, particularly as it referred to commu-

nication. RM4 appeared particularly attuned to the spatial needs of many people living together in a small dwelling.

Physiological Data

Physiological data included the fact that one subject (CM3) is a twin. CM1 and CM4 both acknowledged their need for physical activity and demonstrated their inability to sit for a long time. They are both in Group B. Three students reported missing significant amounts of school time due to illness--RF2, CF1, and CM1. In each instance they attributed some of their underachievement to the fact that when a substantial amount of time and work are missed, it is difficult to make it up. In addition, two of them said that a certain number of days absence from school resulted in no credit for a course regardless of whether or not the student passed the course.

CF1 reported that she was older than most of her friends; CM1 was younger than most of his friends. CM1 stated he has a tendency to go out of town to visit his older friends who have completed high school.

All three of the female subjects smoked heavily during the interview. CF1 was the only subject to mention her smoking, saying that she did not hide this activity from her mother.

None of the physiological data, with the possible exception of absence from school due to illness appears to relate to the subjects' perception of self. Insofar as school absence is related to grades and underachievement, illness may be a factor in perception of self as an underachiever.

Emotional Data

Emotional data revealed a noticeable lack of expression of positive feelings about themselves, even though the subjects spoke to a variety of feelings about self and relationships with others. Both RM1 and CF1 said they were bored. RM1 felt trapped in his small New England town. CM2 expressed feelings of uncertainty about the future, while CM3 felt a need to get his life in order. RF1 doesn't like to rely on others, while RF2 wants to please others. RM4 and CM3 express disappointment with their performance and CM3 says he is angry with himself. RM2 and CM4 don't care what others think and CM4 doesn't like bowing to authority.

The only specific feeling that could be described as positive to be articulated by any of the eleven subjects came from RM3 who said his skill at role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons made him feel powerful. The majority of the subjects said at one time or another during the interview that they felt "good" about something (usually

a competency) but they did not use positive adjectives (happy, excited, lively, etc.) when discussing themselves or their lives.

Behaviors and Characteristics

The data on behaviors and characteristics provided more positive statements about the self from the subjects. RM1 said he was self reliant. Both he and RM2 characterized themselves as interesting. RF1 said she was independent, while RM4 claims to be open minded.

Rf1, RF2, and CM3 characterized themselves as people-oriented (friendly, easy-going and able to get along with people). RM3 said he is a good test taker. Both CM2 and CF1 perceive themselves as quiet but for different reasons: CM2 says he thinks before he speaks and is quiet while CF1 says she is quiet (in class) because she doesn't like where she is.

CF1, CM2, and RF2 all characterized themselves as being selectively responsible. CF1 chooses her responsible behaviors in specific situations while CM2 and RF2 are clear in expressing the importance of being responsible in the workplace as opposed to school.

RF2 does characterize herself as a "goof-off". She, CM4, and CM3 all say that they procrastinate. CF1, CM4, and RM3 say that they are lazy. CM2 clearly states that he

chooses not to do his homework, while CM1 alludes to the same. RM2, RM4, and CM3 characterize themselves as having ability but not demonstrating that ability through academic achievement. RF1 mentioned the fact that her mood determines whether or not she does her homework. Both RM1 and RM4 say that it is characteristic of them to do one thing for a period of time and then go on to another activity (whether the first one is completed or not), while CM4 says he chooses to read or do more interesting things instead of his homework assignments after school.

A major pattern emerging from student perceptions of self as defined by characteristics appears to focus on the characteristic known as responsibility in both its positive and negative aspects (responsible or irresponsible), particularly at work and in the classroom. All subjects characterized themselves as responsible (or irresponsible) to a greater or lesser degree. The trait was referred to specifically and focused or generally and non-focused, explicitly and implicitly.

Two levels of responsibility were defined by the researcher. Level 1 refers to responsible or irresponsible behavior that involves conscious choice and focus. Level 2 refers to responsible or irresponsible behavior that is

general and unfocused; it may or may not involve conscious choice (See Table 7).

Table 7

Perceived Levels of Responsibility

Level 1 A chosen Response Focused	Level 2 Chosen or Unchosen Response General and Unfocused	Levels 1 & 2
RF1	RM2	RF2
RM1	RM3	CF1
CM1	RM4	CM4
CM2	CM3	

Focused choices include a) the choice to be responsible at work rather than school, b) the choice not to do homework, c) the choice to pursue a series of activities and accept the consequences of not completing one or more of them, c) the choice to allow mood to determine quantity and quality of function, and d) choices regarding inter-personal relationships. Non-focused choices include the traits of a) procrastination, b) laziness and c) general lack of follow-through.

Four students perceived themselves to function at Level 1 responsibility (RF1, RM1, CM1, and CM2). Four students appeared to perceive themselves at Level 2 (RM2, RM3, RM4, and CM3). Three students perceived themselves in both levels (RF2, CF1, CM4). All the young women perceived them

selves to be responsible through choice, although two of them fell into both levels. Otherwise, there appeared to be no significant differences between students from the two districts.

An attempt was made to determine a relationship between the three groups of self perceptions and the nature of the of the subject's perception of responsibility. Again, there appeared to be no evident relationship between group and level.

Competency Data

Competency data was collated according to the five categories of giftedness as defined by the United States Office of Education (general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative and productive thinking ability, leadership aptitude, and ability in the visual and performing arts) as well as an additional three categories (athletic ability, psychosocial ability, and workplace ability). It must be noted that the data collected here does not refer to actual documented material regarding observed proficiency in any of the areas of giftedness with the exception of that labeled "general intellectual ability." The competencies referred to are those perceived by the subjects to be areas in which they feel they are strong (See Table 8).

Table 8

Perceptions of Competency

Area of Competency	Number of students Claiming Competency
General Intellectual Ability	6
Specific Academic Aptitude	7
Creative and Productive Thinking	4
Visual and Performing Arts	6
Athletics	6
Combined Arts and Athletics	9
Psychosocial Abilities	5
Work	8

When the data was collated, it was discovered that no student had declared him/herself to hold competency in the category titled "leadership." However, of the five areas of giftedness, leadership is that which may not be evident until later in life. Since many of the qualities used to define a leader can be considered psychosocial skills, the absence of specific expressed competencies as a leader is not considered significant.

General Intellectual Ability

All of the subjects at some time during the interview indicated that they were "smart." However, only six of the subjects referred to general intellectual ability or "smartness" as a competency.

Specific Academic Aptitude

Seven subjects mentioned specific academic abilities as a competency; three of them mentioned two academic areas. Several specific academic abilities were mentioned; reading (CM2, CF1), English (CM1, RM2), History (CM4, CM1, RM4), Computers (RM3), and Mathematics (RM3, CM4).

Creative and Productive Thinking

In the area of creative and productive thinking, four students felt they were competent. RM1 "free associates ideas" and is a writer. RM3 applies his ability for "finding things out" to the design of role playing games. CM2 considers himself to be a logical thinker and "a good test taker". CM3 believes that his strength lies in his ability to "work with concepts, rather than with problems."

Visual and Performing Arts

Six subjects felt they were competent in the visual or performing arts. For purposes of this study, the creation of crafts is considered a visual art. Five of the six claim competency in more than one area. RF1 works with crafts in school and has completed a number of woodworking projects, including a hope chest and a clock. CF1 also produces craft projects and draws with pen and ink. RF2 is a vocalist and a pianist; CM4 and RM4 are also vocal and instrumental musicians. CM1 is a musician, an artist, and silk screens.

Four of the six students are musicians; only one, CM4, is a serious music student.

Athletic Ability

The original USOE definition of giftedness included the athlete as a gifted person due to psycho-motor skills. This category was eliminated in 1978 and the athlete was included under the heading of visual and performing arts. Six subjects perceived themselves to be competent in one or more athletic activities. CF1 and RM1 skateboard, CF1 ice-skates, RM2 skis, CM3 is a tennis player (he is not on the school team due to poor grades), RM4 swims, and CM4 is a tennis player and a member of the team at his school.

When the categories of visual and performing arts and athletic ability are combined, nine of the eleven subjects are included. Only RM3 and CM2 do not perceive themselves as having either of those abilities. Only two of the athletes are connected with team sports; however, there are no ski or swim teams at RM2 and Rm4's school. None of the eleven subjects are involved in major school athletics. Swimming, skiing, skating, and tennis may be said to be life-long individual rather than short-term team sports. Track abilities may be transmuted into jogging or aerobic exercise as an individual sport during adulthood. Skate-

boarding is perhaps the activity least adaptable to long-range adult enjoyment. The athletic pattern to emerge from this group of subjects is one of development of abilities and skills in long-term individual or small group activities rather than in the more highly competitive team sports.

When the area of visual and performing arts is combined with athletics, as in the current USOE definition of gifted abilities, nine of the eleven subjects consider themselves to be competent, with four of the subjects claiming ability in both arenas. These students perceive themselves as having abilities in fields that are not traditionally academic.

Psychosocial Abilities

The perceptions of slightly less than half of the subjects indicated that they perceived themselves as being pyschosocially competent. The three female subjects spoke to this particular competency. RF1 mentioned her close ties to family and home (which make it difficult for her to leave the area). She exhibited compassion when speaking of the people for whom she cared in a nursing home position. RF2 was clear in perceiving her ability to interact with others as well as to get along with others. CF1 felt that she was a person in whom others could confide. This was confirmed as she spoke of her friends and their problems.

RM4 was in agreement with RF2 as he spoke of his ability to relate to others. He also demonstrated an intellectual understanding of and empathy with his family during their current situation. CM3 felt he has a small number of good friends with whom he can interact. All of the females and only twenty five percent of the males verbalized skills in the psychosocial arena.

Work

Work, and the subjects' perceptions of themselves and their work was discussed by eight of the eleven subjects (See Table 9).

Table 9

Perceptions of Work Related Competency

Working With meaning	Working Without meaning	Not now Working	Has not Worked
RF2	RM2	RF1	RM1
CM2	RM4	CF1	CM4
	RM3	CM1	
		CM3	

Three students discussed work prior to the actual interview questions concerning work. RF1, from the beginning talked of herself in relationship to work, "any work". Work is the mechanism by which she is able to define herself as being independent; the type of work appears to be immaterial

to her. She is not working at present, and appears seriously concerned about it. RF2 discussed work in terms of the job defining her as a responsible person. She has progressed in her employment from one level to another and feels that work is more important to her than school, "because I can earn money and support myself." CM2 believes he is most reliable at work; he has progressed from his initial level of employment to a position of some responsibility. While he does not feel that the current job is one he wants to keep for the rest of his life, it is important to him.

The remaining students who are actually working have somewhat different perceptions. RM2 works after school each day, but it is "just a job." He feels he handles his responsibilities well, but that putting materials on a conveyer belt is not a particularly challenging position. RM4 also works, but does not invest his job with any more challenge than RM2.

Two students have worked but are not now employed. CF1 worked at a fast-food restaurant for a period of time; "That sure wasn't for me," she said. "I don't want to sling burgers for the rest of my life." CM1 also worked as a general handyman one summer to "see what slave labor was like." He does not now work.

Of the five student who work, two feel the work to be a competency, one by which they can define themselves. The

other two students work because it is a job and gives them some money. Two who do not work chose to stop because the work was not satisfying to them, while the third student who is not working wants to be back at a job. It would appear that meaningful work is an aid to the perception of self that these students hold, as the individual defines meaningful work. For two students, their specific positions have value for them; for one student any kind of work is considered to have meaning. For the remaining students, work did not appear to be a useful attribute to them in defining themselves.

Roles

Roles were arbitrarily assigned to the subjects on the basis of the interview content. The roles included family member, peer, student, and worker. Perceptions of the subjects regarding their roles were noted under the appropriate heading. Self perception (based on the Purkey concept of self) was described earlier in the chapter; students perceived themselves as evolving, externally defined, and undefined.

Examination of the four roles indicated that nine of the eleven subjects perceived themselves in one or more roles. Four of the subjects (CM2, CM3, CM4, RM3) appeared to have one primary role; five subjects (RF1, RF2, RM1, CF1,

CM1) appeared to define themselves according to two roles; while one subject (RM4) appeared to be functioning at an equal level in all four roles. One subject (RM2) did not appear to have any specific role by which he defined himself (See Table 10).

Table 10
Frequency with which Roles were Mentioned

Number of Roles	Number of Subjects
None	1
One	4
Two	5
Three	0
Four	1

Of the students who saw themselves in one role, CM3 saw himself in the peer role, CM4 can be defined as a student, and CM2 is a worker. The students who held dual roles included RF1 and RF2 who are family members and workers, CF1 who is a family member and peer, and RM1 and CM1 who are students and peers.

It must be remembered for purposes of this study that role definition(s) for the individual subject was based on its comparison with the other roles for the individual and not the group. It must also be remembered that all students gave some response in each role category and that the role

delineations presented here may be viewed as part of a continuum rather than discrete entities.

Peer

The peer role appeared to be primary for CM3, while for CF1 (family member), RM1 (student), and CM1 (student), this was one of two roles. CM3 spoke to his few close friendships rather than to having rather than to having "a lot of friends". He likes to joke and be around his friends. He did not like being judged by his peers according to his address, nor was he happy with the disbelief he faced from his peers when he did make the honor role one quarter. He spoke about finding and meeting "real people" in the drafting class he chose to take, saying that once he knew these other students, his own stereotyped view of them changed.

CM1 spoke about his friends, that they are older than he, that many live in other cities and are in college now, and that they are "a lot like me." By this he referred to his "punk rocker" style of dress, his modified Mohawk haircut, the three earrings in one ear (not pierced because he did not want to upset his parents), and his skateboarding. His friends and their activities together (skateboarding, guitar playing, traveling to New York City) appear to be important to him.

RM1 talked about his grade school years, saying he felt rejected then due to his economic status, but feels it has made him a better person. "I wasn't exactly happy at the time, but its made me a better person. A lot of people respect me now who didn't before. Some have actually gone so far as to apologize." He talked about trips to New York to attend concerts with friends and about skateboarding with friends.

CF1's relationship to her friends appears different than the others. She says at first that she doesn't know how her friends see her, then says (a) they are younger than she which "makes me feel weird," (b) that they confide in her, and (c) she tries to be there for her friends. She spoke for more than 20 minutes about her friends and a variety of serious problems in their lives. She appeared to be seeking solutions for some of the problems, saying that appropriate education courses in school might alleviate some of them.

CM3 appeared to focus on the meaning of relationships, CM1 and CM2 interact with peers who are similar to them, and CF1 appears to be the repository of confidences regarding serious issues in the lives of her peers.

Student

Examination of the student role revealed that all eleven subjects define themselves as underachieving students. Only RF2 however, says initially, "...me, the underachiever." RF2 indicated to the researcher that she was planning to see her guidance counselor the day after the interview because she was dropping out of school. RM1 is a high school dropout.

CM4 defined himself primarily as a student while CM1 and RM1 view themselves as students as well a peers. CM4's student definition is based primarily on the number of extracurricular activities, school based, in which he participates. He is a member of the track team and the choir. He was a basketball player until injury resulted in his being cut from the team. As the only serious student of music in the group, his orchestral performances are found on the regional and state level. There is no orchestra at his school. In terms of student academic performance, he spoke of a conversation he had with a teacher. "If I keep going the way I am, in future life, I'm not going to amount to much." When asked how he felt about that statement, he replied, "It might mean something if I liked him, but he's not the kind of person I look up to." He talked at length about his classes and their purpose and meaning to him.

CM1 appeared to echo his sentiments regarding classroom

performance in somewhat different words when he said that he is "someone who's not stupid, but doesn't work to genius level." He went on to say that "it doesn't bother me so much because I know eventually something will happen." He also is one of the few students who is involved in extracurricular activities in the form of school clubs which he doesn't attend regularly because he can't remember when they meet.

RM1, although a high school dropout, is now a college student, enrolled through Continuing Education. He sat for, and passed, the General Equivalency Degree (GED) and is proud of that fact. He talked about his courses at the college, the knowledge he is gaining from them, and the challenge they represent. He says that he likes being a college student, that it has meaning for him.

Worker

One student defined himself primarily as a worker. CM2 said he works 25-30 hours a week. "Basically, all I've done is work and go to school." He works to make money and considers himself a reliable worker, as opposed to his reliability in school (he does not do homework). He has worked through a variety of levels of responsibility in his job, and his employers would like him to work more. He does say however, that "it is not a bad business, but it's not

something I want to do the rest of my life."

RF2 has also moved up through levels of responsibility in her position, but is somewhat worried that leaving school will jeopardize her position. She says that she "is responsible to them [her employers]. I come to work, rain or shine." She goes on to say that work is one means by which one can demonstrate a sense of responsibility, not only to employers, but to family.

RF1 has worked at a variety of jobs since she was 12 years old. She considers herself basically self supporting, and says simply, "I like to work. It doesn't matter what kind; any kind of work." She left her last position due to what appear to have been difficult societal issues with some co-workers. She enjoyed the job, providing meals for those unable to provide for themselves, and did not like to leave the position. Her rural environment dictates automobile transportation. Her car is not running and she is concerned that this will affect her ability to keep whatever job she obtains next.

Family member

RM3 was the only student who focused primarily on his role as a family member. He spoke about playing with his little brother's Legos and mentioned that his father says he is too old to play with that stuff. His parents do not

approve of his role-playing games, he says, because it is escapism and too unrealistic. "They may not like it because they've been in reality so long that's all they can see." They have forbidden him to have anything to do with role-playing games and computers because of a prank that backfired. One of his major interests is computers, but his parents, he says again, are against technology. When talking about parents' perceptions of him, he grinned and said that "my father wouldn't think I was alert, but he would think I was intelligent." His last remarks about his family were, "I've learned to accept my parents for what they are and to ignore the parts that need ignoring." He spoke more directly about his family than any other student except RM4.

The three female students all defined themselves in terms of family membership as one of two major roles. All three young women chose to be interviewed in their homes. RF1 was moving when she said, "I have a good relationship with my mother, really, really good. I can tell her anything and she listens." She also spoke of her need to be near her home when she talked about career choices. "I have to be near here. I get wicked homesick when I go away."

RF2 said her parents were supportive of her as she made her decision to live in an apartment. They have helped her

with her automobile purchase and have kept in touch with her. "It's always a challenge to please your parents," she said, "and be what they want you to be." It is especially important to her to please her father. One wants to please one's parents, she went on, "if you have been brought up in a loving relationship, [sic] which they have." She discussed her parents' concerns for her younger sister who has a physical handicap; she was knowledgeable about her problem. She is the only student to include a significant other as a family member; she in newly engaged to be married.

CF1 appears to bear responsibility for her younger sisters after school and on weekends while her divorced mother is at work. "My sisters and I are best friends." She has, she says, a trusting relationship with her mother, but avoids contact with her father. "I don't really feel anything about my dad because I don't care." She agrees with her mother's viewpoints when discussing family issues. From her statements, it appears that the divorce has been a major event in this student's life, although she did not articulate it as such. She did say that after her parents divorced, her grades went down.

RM3 appears to be in somewhat of an adversarial role with his parents at the present time, while RF1 and RF2 have a positive relationship with their families. RF1 and CF1 appear to have particularly close relationships with their

mothers. All three females define themselves in terms of family role, and two of the three also consider themselves workers.

Even role distribution

RM4 discussed himself in all four roles -- peer, student, worker, and family member. In each role, he seemed clear in his perceptions. As a peer, in general he has "a positive relationship with people, with some exceptions. The exceptions are acquaintances who may make quick impressions [of me]. It might bother me; they're entitled; if it changes, it changes." As a student, he participates in extracurricular activities (band and choir) and agrees with his teachers that he is not living up to his potential. He states that this is not due to lack of motivation, but "that's, you know, for other reasons." The other reasons include lack of coursework in fields of interest, and choices around interest areas. In his role as employee, he says, "I'm good, for the most part. What's small to me is a big deal to him (his employer). He is the way he is, and I am the way I am." He has difficulty in carrying on a conversation with his boss because they have nothing in common. When he discusses his family he says that he doesn't interact with his parents much. There are six people, including an invalid older relative, living in a small ranch

home ("It gets bunched up in there"). He spoke freely of his family situation and mentioned his family members with affection even though, "you can almost feel the intensity. You just want to channel down to your room or leave altogether."

Limited Role Distribution

On the other hand, RM2 did not appear to identify by role, although he talked a bit more about his work than other roles. He differentiated friends and acquaintances by saying that his friends "know me better." He also said that he has good friends and mentioned several people with whom he interacts. He felt he was an interesting student, and that as far as his job is concerned, "I don't go there to have fun, but I've had worse jobs." He briefly mentioned his older brother and his infant step-sister, but did not expand on his relationship with them or on his relationship with his step-father.

Summary of Role Data

A review of the role data indicated that all but one of the eleven subjects perceived themselves in one or more roles. The subject who perceived himself in all four roles was extremely articulate; the subject who appeared undefined was more hesitant to speak. All students perceived them-

selves as underachievers. The student role appeared to be based on extracurricular activities as well as scholastic activities for two of the students.

Those who perceived themselves primarily as workers based this perception on their work experience; all three of them claimed work as a competency as well as a role and said it was important to them. Two of the three workers are female.

The peer role had meaning for four students. One focused on the meaning of relationships, one acted as listener for friends, and two saw the role as one of interaction with peers. Two of these students are friends.

All of the female subjects and one male subject saw themselves as family members. Two of the females also saw themselves as workers. One of these subjects appears to be in conflict with both parents and one appears to have some conflict with the father, but has a good relationship with the mother. The remaining two subjects appear to have good relationships with both parents, but one female relates more to her father than her mother.

In defining the peer and family member roles as interpersonal roles as opposed to academic (student) and career (worker) roles, eight of the eleven subjects perceive themselves primarily in social terms.

Summary of Cross Variable Data

Cross variable data summary indicated that there were many similarities among the female subjects. All three focused their choices in areas of responsibility, while one was also non focused in her approach to issues of responsibility. All stated perceptions of competency in the visual and performing arts, including crafts. All three possess psychosocial skills, and all three looked at family membership as an important role in their lives. One of the female subjects appeared to define her core self through external competencies while the other two appeared to be uncertain as to their core self definition.

All of the "A Group", (those subjects who defined their core selves as evolving) are male, and represent one half of the male sample. All of this group perceived themselves as creative and productive thinkers. Only one of the group A males identified work as a competency, but for two it was a role.

All of the three group B subjects (those who defined their core selves according to external competencies or roles) were focused in their attitude toward responsibility, with two of them perceiving themselves to function in both a focused and general manner.

All of the four group C subjects (those uncertain of core definition of self) perceived themselves to be competent in the visual and performing arts or in some athletic endeavor. Three of them perceived work to have little or no meaning in their lives, while the fourth perceived a role as a worker. All four of these subjects defined at least one of their roles in psychosocial terms.

Five of the eight males (including all of Group A) perceived themselves to be creative and productive thinkers. No female perceived herself this way even though all of the females perceived themselves as competent in the visual and performing arts. Seven of the eight males saw themselves as having some competence in athletics. All of the females saw themselves as being competent workers, even though work had no meaning for one of them. The male subjects perceived themselves somewhat differently. Four males perceived (their) work as having no meaning. Work was not applicable to three males. Only one male perceived work as having meaning in his life. Work does not appear to be important in the lives of seven of the eight males and one female.

No other patterns of significance appeared to emerge from analysis of the cross category data.

Summary of Data Analysis

Research question #1 was designed to discover how gifted academic underachieving students perceive themselves. A core statement of self was elicited from the question "Who are you?" which was triangulated with interview data, and based on the Purkey model of self which postulates the evolution of perception of self from characteristics, attributes, and roles and the value placed on them by the self and others (See Table 11).

Comparison of the eleven responses to the base question revealed three general modes by which these gifted student perceive themselves. The first mode focuses on an evolving sense of self and appears to reflect a conceptual view of the self. These four students are all male. The second mode focuses on external competencies or roles to define the self; two males and one female comprise this group. The third mode (two males and two females) appears to be one of uncertainty about the self. Two students appear to be in transition from one mode to another.

Review of the socioeconomic data revealed that three of the four students who perceived themselves from an evolving conceptual mode were knowledgeable about their socioeconomic status and its relationship to their lives. The data on physical status was indeterminate except for the fact that three of the eleven subjects reported missing a significant

Table 11
Summary of Adolescent Perceptions of Self

Category	Student										
	"Rural"						"City"				
	F1	F2	M1	M2	M3	M4	F1	M1	M2	M3	M4
Perception of Self											
Evolving			x		x	x				x	
External		x							x		x
Undetermined	x			x			x			x	
Characteristics											
Responsible, focused	x			x					x	x	
Responsible, unfocused					x	x	x				x
Both			x					x			x
Competencies											
Academic			x	x		x			x	x	
Creative, Productive Thinking			x			x	x			x	x
Visual, Performing Arts	x	x				x		x	x		x
Athletics			x			x		x	x		x
Psychosocial	x	x						x			x
Work											
Meaningful work	x	x							x		
Meaningless work				x		x		x	x		x
Not applicable			x		x						x
Roles											
Peer			x			x		x	x		x
Family member	x	x			x			x			
Student			x						x		x
Worker	x	x							x		
None				x							
All						x					

amount of school due to illness. The relationship between absenteeism due to illness and underachievement was mentioned by each of them.

There was a lack of data concerning the emotional or feeling perceptions these students have of themselves. Occasionally a student would say that he/she felt "good" about something, but they seldom elaborated.

The major pattern to emerge from the student perceptions of self as defined by characteristics is that of the subject as a responsible person. Responsibility is perceived on a continuum, from responsible to irresponsible and is seen as either specific and focused (Level 1), or general and non-focused (Level 2).

Competency data found that all subjects perceived themselves as being generally intellectually gifted, although only six of them referred to this as a specific competency. Seven considered themselves to be competent in specific academic arenas, with three general headings (English, Mathematics, and History) which were evenly distributed among the population. Four subjects felt they were creative and productive thinkers. Only two of these also felt they had some specific academic competency.

Six subjects perceived themselves to be competent in the visual and performing arts; craft work was included in this category. Four of the six are vocal or instrumental musicians; only one of these students is a serious student of music.

Six subjects perceived themselves to be competent in the athletic arena. None of the six is a member of a "major" high school team (football, basketball, baseball), but one is on the track team. One was cut from the basketball team due to injury; another was cut from the tennis team due to poor grades. Two other athletes do not know what their team status might be; the school does not have those teams. The majority of athletic activities of these students are those which can be carried on into adulthood.

When the arenas of visual and performing arts and athletics are combined (as they are in the current USOE definition of giftedness), nine of the eleven subjects claim competency, with four of them having ability in both fields. These students perceive themselves as having abilities in fields that are not traditionally academic.

Competency data found the competency of leadership merged into the larger arena of psychosocial abilities. Five subjects felt they were competent in dealing with people. All three female subjects (100%) spoke to this competency, while only two (25%) of the males perceived themselves being competent in this area.

The competency of work was important to three subjects, two female and one male, even though eight spoke to the issue. It appeared that meaningful work was an aid to

perception of self as individual students defined meaningful work.

Roles were assigned to the students on the basis of the structure of the interview questions. The roles included self, peer, family member, student, and worker. Examination of the data indicated that nine of the eleven subjects perceived themselves in one or more roles. Four appeared to have one primary role, five defined themselves according to two roles, and one subject appeared to be functioning on an equal level in all four roles. The remaining subject did not appear to have any particular role by which he defined himself.

No major pattern of role preference could be found; there was fairly equal distribution of preference across the four roles. The only area of unanimous agreement occurred when all subjects stated that they are underachieving in their role as student. However, if the label of student is considered to be one of academic definition, the label of worker is considered to be one of career definition, and the labels of peer and family member are considered to be psychosocial definitions of role, then it may be said that the majority of the eleven subjects (eight) perceive themselves in terms of social definition.

It is perhaps significant that all three female subjects showed marked similarities in perceptions, unlike the

male subjects. All chose to be interviewed in their homes, all defined themselves in terms of family membership as one of two major roles, had similar attitudes toward responsibility, and had similar competencies in the visual and performing arts.

In addition, cross variable analysis revealed that all the students who were included in Group A were male, more than one half of the male students (including all of group A) claimed competency in creative and productive thinking, while none of the female students perceived themselves in this manner. Work did not appear to be meaningful to seven of the eight males and one female; however the students who defined their role as worker also perceived work to be a competency.

In conclusion, it would appear that there are six major findings to emerge from this data analysis. (a) The subjects were equally divided in their perceptions of the core self as evolving, externally defined, or uncertainly defined. (b) The subjects generally did not define themselves in terms of feelings. (c) The students tended to characterize themselves as being on a continuum in regard to the trait known as responsibility. They appeared to be either focused or unfocused in their dealing with responsibility. (d) They all perceived themselves as being both

intellectually gifted and underachieving. (e) More students perceived themselves as being competent in the visual and performing arts and in athletics than in the traditional academic subjects. (f) The majority of the subjects perceived themselves to have a social rather than career or academic orientation to life.

Research Question # 2
How do Gifted Adolescent Academic Underachievers Perceive their Academic Underachievement?

Analysis of the data pertaining to Research Question #2 is based on the assumption that academic underachievement is usually observed in the larger context of a general academic milieu which includes both demonstrated academic competence as evidenced by grades and accomplishments and a sense of meaningful academic purpose, demonstrated by positive motivation to learn.

Responses to the question, "How do you do in school?" (See Appendix C: Interview Category 3; Perceptions of Academic Competence) provide the general academic framework within which academic underachievement can be examined. Responses to the remaining questions in Interview Category 3 provide the more specific context in which to examine perceptions of academic underachievement. Perceptions of academic competence (how the students "did" in school) were accompanied by perceptions of specific academic strength or weakness. Students were also asked to recall when they began to underachieve academically.

When underachievement was examined as an entity, four main areas of focus emerged: (1) the extent to which the subjects perceived a choice to underachieve and the extent

to which they were aware of the consequences of the underachievement; (2) the role of the underachievement phenomenon in subject self-esteem (as evidenced by their statements of feeling regarding underachievement); (3) the role of motivation as a factor in academic achievement and under-achievement for these gifted students; and (4) subject awareness of the possible relationship of underachievement to a larger life context.

Data Analysis

Onset of Underachievement

Ten of the eleven subjects recalled the onset of their academic underachievement, with four subjects providing a rationale for the underachievement. Onset was evenly divided among the elementary, middle, and secondary school years.

Three began to underachieve in elementary school. One student said, "I began goofing off in second grade; studying five minutes and then blowing it off." The second student also began to underachieve in the second grade. He said, "I always got poor grades; way back in grade school in the second grade I had some problems with the teacher." The third student said that he had always had problems with math, and in the fourth grade was working at second grade

level. Each of these students attended a small, rural, elementary school.

Four students perceived their underachievement to begin during the middle school years, saying such things as, "I started dropping in Jr. High," and "I didn't think the work was necessary." One student traced the onset of underachievement to her inability to do fractions and decimals in her eighth grade math class.

Three students began to underachieve in high school. One student points to her family situation as a possible cause of her underachievement while another student was clear in saying that he is having too much fun to do the work necessary for A level grades. The third student chose not to do homework, recognizing the consequences of his action. While one student was unable to determine the onset of underachievement, it appears that his grades did not begin to slip until the high school years when he felt the curriculum did not challenge him enough.

Six of the eleven subjects mentioned the fact that they did not have to do much, if any, work in elementary school in order to get good grades. They said, "I breezed through elementary school," "didn't have to study," or "in early grades, I cranked out A's like everyone."

Perceptions of General Academic Competence

Responses to the question, "how do you do in school?" were given by the subjects in three general ways; (a) general response, (b) class-room oriented response (either content based or general), and (c) grade (mark) response. The responses were evenly divided. Nine of the eleven students reported that they were not doing well at that time; two were experiencing success, although they had been underachieving until that time.

Four students were succinct yet general in describing their perceptions: "Awful," "lousy," "poorly," and "generally badly." The three who responded in terms of their classes said such things as "do well in classes I like," "social sciences," and "depends on the class." The remaining four students referred to grades as the indicator of their scholastic performance. Two responded in the negative, by saying "not on the honor role" and "generally poor grades." The remaining two students were doing well at the time of the interviews. One student said, "I was on the honor role this quarter," while the other said that his grades in college were very good. This particular student, a high school dropout who enrolled in a four year college as a continuing education student, did say that his "grades were never good" when he was in the public school system.

Academic Strengths and Weaknesses

Academic strengths and weaknesses, as perceived by the subjects, were analyzed for possible patterns of academic competency. The perception of academic strength and/or weakness was that of the individual student and was not necessarily reflected by academic grades.

The eleven students mentioned twenty six discrete areas of academic strength. These discrete areas were combined into six categories of academic strength; a) language arts, b) the "soft" sciences (Social Studies, History, and Social Sciences), c) the hard sciences (Mathematics and Science), d) Visual and Performing Arts, e) Vocational Studies, and f) academic aptitude. Five students mentioned three academic strength areas, five students mentioned two strengths and one student gave only one response.

Six students accounted for the eight responses in the category of soft science. Seven of the eight responses focused on history and social studies as a strength, saying such things as "I seem to be able to understand it more; it makes more sense," "it's been a continual influence throughout my life," and "history--depending on how it's taught." History accounted for the single highest number of responses as an academic strength.

Six students perceived themselves to be strong in the humanities, with English the focus of three students.

Visual and performing arts included crafts to maintain consistency with competency perception discussed in the analysis of research question #1. There were four responses in this category; two students perceived themselves as having strength in the craft area, but only one student stated that art and music were academic strengths. All three female subjects were included in this category. The hard sciences were mentioned by three students; two were interested in science and one in mathematics. Two students felt their strengths were in the vocational field (child care and mechanical drawing). Aptitude was mentioned by two students. One felt he was a logical thinker and the second described his strengths as test taking ability and the ability to theorize. This particular student did not mention any specific academic strengths although during the interview he spoke at length about discovering the Pythagorean theorem on his own through "fooling around."

When all the responses were examined, ten of the eleven students perceived themselves as proficient in either the humanities or the so called soft sciences. Only two students mentioned science as an ability and only one perceived himself to be proficient in math. Ten of the eleven students perceived themselves as having competencies in more than one academic area and that of the two students who

selected vocational studies as strength areas, one was on the honor role for the quarter and the other said that the child care classes were about "the only thing I'm doing OK in."

Subjects' perceptions of their academic weaknesses appeared to be more clearly delineated. The eleven students mentioned ten specific areas of weakness, with a total of seventeen responses. The seventeen responses fell into three categories; the hard sciences (mathematics, science), language arts (handwriting, grammar and spelling), and academic product (test taking, procrastination, class participation). Six students mentioned just one weak area, four students perceived themselves as having two weaknesses, and only one student gave three responses.

Seven students clearly stated that their major weakness was mathematics, the largest single perceived number of weaknesses. "Anything analytical, math, algebra; geometry, although at least in geometry you can draw a picture and look at it," "I have a brain more oriented towards words," "I didn't understand algebra II because I didn't understand algebra I," and "too many numbers." Some did not see the relevance of higher level math to their lives. "I'm never going to need to know the logarithm of my bank account," and "What does a waitress need calculus for?" An eighth student was included in this category for both math and science

because he said he could not just memorize the formulas. "I'd figure out different ways to figure out the problem; I'd reason it out so wouldn't use a formula. So there'd be a test with part theory and part formulas, and it was clean cut; the first half everything right, the second, everything all wrong." This student also recalled doing badly in math in the early elementary school years.

Two students reported lack of strength in language arts. "Technical problems," said one, "spelling, grammar." "Handwriting," sighed the second.

Four students perceived their major weakness(es) to be lack of an appropriate academic product. The one student who mentioned three areas of academic weakness perceived all her weaknesses to be connected with product. "Tests are bad for me. I don't do the work so I don't know the facts." She went on to say that she does not do term papers because they are long term projects and she thinks and functions in short blocks. She then said, "I'm a real procrastinator." One other student found procrastination to be a weakness primarily because he dislikes hard work and then puts things off. (Unlike the other procrastinator however, he perceives himself to be a good test taker).

"Writing," responded one student. "I start things and don't finish." This was not considered procrastination

since he explained that he would complete the paper in his head and then go on to something else because he was finished with that particular project. This process did cost him grades. The fourth student found lack of class participation to be a problem for her. She chose not to participate in class discussions, primarily because she was having a problem with a teacher and had little in common with her fellow students. She was cognizant of the fact that class participation was considered when grades were being averaged.

Choice and Consequences

The subjects were asked (a) whether they chose to underachieve academically, (b) to provide a rationale for their answer, and (c) to indicate their perceptions of the consequences of underachievement. Three students said that they made a conscious choice to underachieve, four said that they made a decision sometimes, and the remaining four said they did not choose to underachieve. Seven of the eleven subjects believed that they did make a conscious choice to underachieve at one time or another. Ten students provided one reason for their answer; the eleventh student provided two responses.

Three students' (who answered yes or sometimes) choices to underachieve appeared to be clear to them. One chose not

to do homework because it was meaningless to him. One chose to do other things because they were more interesting and enjoyable. The third said, "I don't really choose to underachieve. I just choose to ignore the work because I don't want to do it."

The other four students who made a choice to underachieve were more general in their responses. Two perceived that they underachieved because of teacher-student personality differences. One felt that underachievement was a psychological game he played, while family problems and individual mood were factors for the others.

One student who stated that he did not choose to underachieve perceived his environment as a limiting factor. The remaining three who said they did not choose to underachieve all defined themselves as procrastinators or indicated that "the work just gets ahead of me."

All the subjects indicated that they were aware of possible (and real) consequences of their academic underachievement. Fourteen responses were provided; nine students perceived one consequence, one perceived two, and one perceived three. The responses broke down into two major categories: academic consequences and personal consequences.

Immediate academic consequences included the possibility of repeating a year (two students) or not graduating (one student). A less immediate academic consequence for only one student was the possibility of not being admitted to the college of his choice. Three other subjects discussed college admission during the interview process, but did not seem to perceive it as a problem. They did perceive that they might attend a "lesser" school, do well there and then the college of their choice would be available to them.

Two students saw the academic consequences of their underachievement in a larger perspective. One was "worried about the future" because he was not sure if others would understand the rationale for his academic actions. The other student tried "not to think about it" because "society looks at the scores" and one is judged on one's performance beyond school. These two students were the only ones who appeared to perceive potential long-term implications of academic underachievement.

Personal consequences for underachievement included loss of privileges for four students ("home aggravation" and grounding), a possible change in other people's perception of the student for two students ("they will think less of me," "there's no second chance"), and also, for two students, a change in self perception. One student found the consequences of underachievement to be negative ("depres-

sing"). This same student perceived there was no second chance for her as far as her teachers were concerned, and she had experienced loss of privileges for poor grades. She dropped out of high school the day after the interview. The student who felt others would think less of him also lost privileges because of his grades. The final student, who dropped out of high school and is now attending college, found the consequences of underachievement somewhat positive.

> In a way it was kind of satisfying, in a strange kind of way, to be labeled stupid, but to know you're not. It was interesting to have that kind of secret that no one knew. It wasn't as positive as if I did real well in school, but I kind of learned to like it.

Underachievement and Self Esteem

The subjects were asked to express their feelings about their academic underachievement to examine the possible impact of underachievement on self esteem (the value placed on the self by the individual). All of the subjects expressed their feelings in terms of a variety of degrees of concern regarding their underachievement. The degrees of concern (labeled serious, moderate, little, and none at the present time) were considered to reflect their feelings about self. Six of the eleven used the word "bother" to describe their concern or lack of concern. The degree of

concern was evenly spread among the subjects. Six of the students were minimally or not concerned about their underachievement; five were moderately or seriously concerned. The students who expressed serious concern represented the entire female sample, and their degree of concern was stated in strong language.

Three students perceived themselves as being seriously concerned about their underachievement, describing themselves as being "ashamed," "a loser," or in a flat tone as "nothing." All of the three initially said that they didn't care about their underachievement. One has since left school. Two students expressed moderate concern ("can't bring myself to do it," "nervous") while three said they were a little concerned about their underachievement ("Some wasted potential, but I get more happiness from doing other things"), and three, at the present time are not concerned. At one point, each of the unconcerned students was concerned; two are now doing well and two had an educational experience in their middle school years which they said facilitated their ability to understand and work within their particular educational framework.

When the students described the reasons for their concern, they gave sixteen specific responses. Seven students gave one reason for their feelings, three gave two reasons, and one student felt there were three reasons for feeling

the way he did about underachievement. Seven students were concerned about the impact of their underachievement on other people, primarily family members. Two perceived their parents to be distressed ("upsets the parents," "bums the parents,"), while two more said they felt they were letting their parents down by underachieving. The others expressed concern in terms of siblings, a mother and "other people." This group includes two students who are not concerned about underachievement themselves at the present time and two of the three who are seriously concerned about their performance.

Three students looked at the impact of underachievement on themselves in a negative manner ("bothers me," "won't pass," "have to feel bad to change"). Two of these three students are seriously concerned about their underachievement.

Seven students looked at the effect of underachievement on themselves in a more positive light. Three said that for them, grades had no meaning (including two who also expressed feelings about a negative impact of underachievement on themselves). Other responses included lack of challenge, "I get more happiness from doing other things," and a reference to the summer educational program experienced by two students, during which, they said, they realized that

their worth as people was not predicated on their academic achievement. Two students specifically said that they were good people and liked themselves regardless of their academic status, while another said he was not concerned because he knew "something eventually would happen."

The above data implies that the three female subjects do not place a high value on themselves as people at the present time; their self esteem could be said to be low. The one subject who was "sick of failure" appeared to have increased his self esteem as a student by improving his grades. (His good feelings about himself as an athlete remained even as his perception of himself as an adequate student became negative). The remaining students appeared to value themselves as individuals even while recognizing and being concerned about their academic performance. They appeared to be more concerned with the impact of their underachievement on others than on themselves.

Motivation

The subjects were asked what helped them to do well when they did do well in school in order to examine the relationship between motivation and underachievement. This question elicited responses from all students, who spoke to their perceptions of motivation both in both positive and

negative terms along with its impact on their academic achievement.

Positive Motivation

Positive motivation was discussed by ten of the eleven subjects who gave twenty one positive responses to the question. One student did not mention any positive motivating forces in his life. The responses were consolidated into four general clusters: teacher-oriented motivation, motivation related to intrapersonal needs, subject interest, and goal-related motivation. Within each of the clusters, the motivation might be external or internal.

Seven students cited the teacher as a motivating force for them. Liking the teacher was important for three subjects. Knowledge of material, organization, and providing a challenge were also important ("If I have a teacher who really knows what they're [sic] doing, I get more excited about the project"). Respect for student opinions and knowledge of whether a student really grasped the material seemed important ("If I understand what I'm trying to to and why I'm trying to do it, it's fine"), although responsibility for student grasp of material might also be considered an intrapersonal factor in academic achievement.

Seven students spoke to intrapersonal needs as motivators. Two said their attitude or mood affected their per-

formance. Others mentioned "feeling strongly about something," "being sick of failure," or "something just goes right. I don't know what it is, but it happens." Two others said that they had a need for "the right atmosphere, the right environment" in order to be motivated. This factor might also be considered by some to be within the cluster of teacher-related motivators.

Four students mentioned subject interest. "My interest helps me do well. If I'm interested, I will do much better." Four subjects were motivated by specific, goal related needs; wanting to graduate, wanting to be on a varsity team, wanting to do "real world" work (which might not be possible without a diploma), and wanting small concrete academic projects that could be completed successfully.

Negative Motivation

Negative motivation, that which the students felt impeded academic success, was mentioned by eight of the subjects. The fourteen responses were divided into four clusters; school-related, teacher-related, intrapersonal dynamics, and interpersonal factors.

Five of the eight responding students mentioned school related perceptions. Repetition and homework were cited as being "just busy work" particularly with the length of the school day. "Seven and a half hours is enough!" Long term,

dull projects were another offender. One student spoke eloquently to his feelings about grades:

> For me, grades are supposed to be the judge of how much the student knows in the subject area. So if you get an F, obviously you don't know anything about the subject, although a lot of the time that's not true.

Half of the students found that dislike of a teacher, or teacher dislike of a student affected their drive to achieve. One student spoke at length about a serious interpersonal problem with a teacher that was resolved only when the student was allowed to change classes. By the time this happened, she reported, her coursework was in such confusion that she did not know whether she could make the grade. (This particular student also said that teachers who gave her "leeway" were helpful. She believes that her current teacher is giving her that leeway).

Three students addressed intrapersonal issues. One student said that he was "lazy and lacked interest" while the second said that the amount of work involved in getting good grades was not worth it. "I'm having too much fun that's not involved with school so I don't really care. I'll be working my tail off until I'm 75 or so, so I'm not going to do it now." The third student was clear in saying that work and earning money were more important than school. This student talked about her wages in terms of developing a life style for herself and her fiance.

Interpersonal issues outside of the school system were perceived to be responsible for a lack of motivation on the part of one student. She was seriously concerned about her underachievement, and said that family problems affected her mood and attitude with the result that she either did not attend school or attended and did not do the work.

Motivation to Remain in School

The subjects were asked why they remained in high school since they were perceived by self and others to be underachieving. All subjects, including the dropouts, answered the question after some thought and reflection. The responses were evenly divided among the nine subjects who did remain in the public secondary school system. Three couched their answers in work specific terms, saying they did not want to spend their lives doing menial work, "slinging burgers." Two do not appear to know precisely what career they want, while the third wants to do "something with child care." Three spoke to a general perception of the future. "It would ruin later opportunities," and "I have nothing to lose and everything to gain by staying in school." The last three referred to personal motivation. "It would be giving up, refusing to fight the system," said one. "I can't do that to myself. I would be lowering myself," said another. "I want to graduate. I want to get

that diploma," was the response of the student who would be the first in her family to graduate from high school.

Interestingly enough, the two students who dropped out of high school gave interpersonal factors as their rationale for remaining in the school system as long as they did. Parental support and social interaction were important to them. The young woman stated that her parents continue to be supportive of her in her present situation although her relationship with her fiance appears to be a factor in her withdrawal from school. The young man who is in college says that social interaction continues to be important to him.

All the students were clear in their perceptions of why they remained in school (or why they left). It might then be inferred from their responses that the students are attempting to come to grips with issues of career, personal identity, and/or interpersonal relationships within the familiar educational environment. There does not appear to be any pattern related to either gender or school catchement area involved in the students' perceptions. Mention might be made, however, of the fact that that the two dropouts attended the same school and both attended the same summer program for the gifted when they were in their middle school years.

Summary of Data Analysis

Perceptions of competence in response to the question "how are you doing in school?" were evenly divided among the subjects in terms of a) generally badly, b) classroom specific (usually couched in positive terms) and c) grade related. Two students were doing well at the time of the interview.

Students perceived their major strength to be in history and their major weakness to be mathematics. Eight of the subjects perceived themselves to be weak in math; some had experienced difficulty since elementary school. The higher levels of math were considered by some subjects to be irrelevant to their current or future needs.

More than half the students said that they made a conscious choice at one time or another to underachieve. All students were aware of the negative consequences of underachievement. Only two male students appeared to perceive potential long term implications of underachievement. One student found academic underachievement to be a positive force for him, both personally and academically.

Academic underachievement appeared to have a negative effect on the self esteem of the three female students. The male students appeared to be concerned about the effect of their underachievement on others' feelings and to be concerned about its impact on their academic or career futures.

However, this did not appear to impact the way they saw themselves as individuals.

The students appeared to recognize that motivation was both a positive and negative factor in their underachievement. Twenty-nine of the thirty-six responses to the questions on motivation were school-related, with eight students stating specifically that the teacher was a critical factor in their drive to achieve or underachieve. Five of the eight students mentioned personal relationships between themselves and the teachers as motivating factors.

Two of the eleven subjects had dropped out of high school. One is currently attending college. The students were clear in citing motives for remaining in school as well as for leaving school. Motivation included the desire for appropriate career options, general future opportunities, and personal and interpersonal needs.

It might be concluded that the gifted academically underachieving sample is aware of the underachievement, is choosing (in some cases) to underachieve because of a variety of factors and is aware of the consequences of academic underachievement. For the most part, the subjects appear to have relatively high self esteem, with the exception of the three female subjects who appear to have incorporated the negative feelings they hold regarding their

academic underachievement into their sense of self and the value they place on it.

It was interesting to note the number of students who perceived history to be a subject of interest and importance and to note that one school had canceled three different social studies courses because of "lack of student interest," indicating a potential inability on the part of the school system to meet the needs of some gifted students. It might also appear significant in terms of curriculum development that eight of the eleven subjects perceived mathematics as their weakest subject area and that they also expressed strong dislike for the subject.

The gifted students in the study placed emphasis on the role of the teacher as motivator, citing like or dislike of a teacher a important to them. A minority cited internal, self motivating factors as being important to their success in school. No gender or regional pattern could be found.

It appeared significant that the majority of students chose to remain in school, and that they gave clear statements for doing so. Their reasons appeared to be connected with the developmental processes of making career choices, making personal decisions about their academic lives, and examining the importance of their relationships with others.

Research Question # 3
To What Extent is the Adolescent's Perception Similar to or Different from that of the Literature?

The literature on gifted underachievement has been reviewed in relationship to definition, identification, causality and dynamics of the phenomenon, characteristics and behaviors of the underachiever, and interventions designed to remediate or prevent the problem. In order to shed light on the phenomenon, eleven gifted adolescents were interviewed to discover their perceptions regarding themselves and their underachievement. Their perceptions will be compared to the findings in the literature in the following areas discussed as part of the underachievement literature review (see Chapter 2); onset, causality, dynamics, and characteristics. For ease in comparison, causality, dynamics and characteristics of the gifted underachiever will be considered jointly as characteristics and conditions that foster gifted academic underachievement within three domains; the child, the family, and the school (See Table 2, p.48). Those characteristics and conditions to be examined will be those perceived by a majority of the total sample to be consistent with or in opposition to the current literature.

Perception of Underachievement

Each of the subjects stated at some time during the interview process that he/she is (or was) not working to capacity in school. The perception of underachievement was stated in general terms ("lousy"), in terms of classroom performance ("depends on the class"), or in terms of grades ("not on the honor role"). Two of the subjects were doing well in school at the time of the interview; one had been on the honor role that quarter and said his improvement was a response to being eliminated from the tennis team. The second student had dropped out of high school because of generally poor grades and was doing well as a college student.

Onset

The literature states that underachievement can be found in the early grade school years (Shaw & McCuen, 1960; Whitmore, 1980). Three of the sample population said they began to underachieve during the elementary years, with two saying that they began to underachieve in second grade. Both of these students have dropped out of high school. The remaining students dated their underachievement from middle school or early high school, attributing the drop in grades to subject difficulty, lack of challenge, or (in some cases) choice to follow another path.

Characteristics within the Student that may foster Underachievement

Complex personality problems

Gallagher (1975) postulates that complex personality problems are the root of gifted underachievement. At this time, all that can be said is that while each of the subjects appeared to be a complex personality, only one gave an indication that she was having difficulties by saying that she was in counseling because her parents and school counselor told her she was depressed. Her own words were that she was "bored." She did not say that she was depressed, although when asked whether counseling was helpful, she said she didn't know because she had only been going for a short time.

Poor Self Concept/Low Self Esteem

The prevailing literature states that the gifted underachiever has a poorer self concept and/or lower self esteem than the general gifted population. Review of the perceptions of the sample population regarding their self concept and self esteem presented a somewhat different picture than the literature. The eleven subjects perceived and described themselves in terms of a) evolving concepts of self and life, b) roles, competencies, and characteristics,

or c) the searching for a sense of self. Within these perceptions, seven of the subjects described themselves as being in the process of change or of having changed in some way. Only one student talked specifically about low self esteem.

Six of the subjects gave positive statements indicating that they felt at home and/or comfortable with themselves as they were ("I trust myself"). An additional three perceived themselves to be changing in a direction that made them feel better about themselves. The process of personal change, rather than perceptions of self concept and self esteem appeared to be a focal point for a majority of the subjects. All of the subjects said that they were underachievers; their major concern regarding the underachievement was not for its impact on themselves, but for the impact the underachievement had on those for whom they cared. They also perceived themselves as being responsible people, although at times they were selective about their responsibility (choosing to work rather than do homework; choosing to stay home from school due to family problems).

The three female students said that they had serious concerns about their underachievement, but only one said specifically that it had a negative effect on her self esteem, even though school in general had both a positive and a negative effect on her feelings about her self. The

other two female students indicated that school in general had no effect on their self concept, implying perhaps that underachievement did impact their self esteem although they did not say so.

The students appeared to be able to isolate the negative feelings they had about specific activities and their underachievement from their general feelings about themselves. One student said he did not feel good about self and was "sick of being a failure" when he was eliminated from a team. However, he improved his grades enough to be returned to the team and he indicated to the interviewer that he felt very good about himself at that particular time. Another student indicated that she felt good about herself when she was working.

It appeared that, in general, the sample perceived themselves in a positive or changing perspective and that negative feelings of self were specific to an issue rather than generic to the person. The subjects did not compare themselves at any time to their achieving gifted counterparts.

Motivation

The literature indicates that the gifted underachiever is not motivated to perform academically. The sample appears to agree behaviorally with the literature since all

the subjects were, or had been underachieving for one or more years. Motivation to achieve (or not to achieve), in the subjects' own words, appeared to be linked to school related conditions (teacher student relationships, challenge in the classroom, etc.) or to personal factors (attitude, mood, need for "right" environment). More than half of the subjects said that they chose to underachieve at one point or another, while the remaining said they did not make a conscious choice to underachieve. All the students indicated their awareness of the negative consequences of academic underachievement. Some subjects said that their worth as a person was not predicated on their academic underachievement. However, the nine students who have remained within the public school system all gave clear reasons for being motivated to remain in school (work specific, personal, or general future benefit) even though their grades were poor.

Lack of Career Goals

A general lack of clear career and life goals and the strategies necessary to meet career and life goals was apparent within the sample population. This diffusion is consistent with the position taken in the literature regarding gifted underachievers. While all of the subjects indicated they planned to attend college "at some time,"

only one student mentioned both a specific institution and a possible life career ("running a day care center"). The subjects were aware of the possible impact of academic underachievement on college acceptance. The lack of career goals was mentioned as emphatically as "I don't have a clue," and as generally as "stocks and bonds, I think." Some subjects spoke of one or more personal interests (writing, physics, money management, etc.) but did not have plans to expand the interest areas into lifelong careers.

Social Orientation

The gifted literature states that the gifted underachiever may be socially immature, socially isolated, or socially oriented. The sample population gave no evidence of social immaturity or social isolation.

They did, however, characterize themselves as having a strong social orientation, evidenced by their self definitions in terms of role. The subjects perceived themselves as social beings (peers and family members rather than students or career oriented workers). They also indicated that they held a global social orientation as evidenced by the human issues they perceived to be major challenges to the world (human acceptance of one another as individuals, expressed as equality, equity, racial harmony).

Family Dynamics as a Factor in Gifted Underachievement

The literature cites complex and difficult family interactions and situations as contributing causes of academic underachievement. Only one subject mentioned possible family problems ("I have family problems, you know") in connection with underachievement. One other student, when describing her life to the researcher said, "My parents divorced; my grades went down," but she did not state at any time that she perceived a connection between the divorce and her academic underachievement.

Other subjects alluded to their families in terms of adolescent-parent relationships, in terms of restrictions as a consequence of poor grades, family feelings about underachievement, or in terms of family issues as sources of dissatisfaction in their lives. The subjects did not specifically and overtly state that they perceived their family situation was responsible for their underachievement. The student who mentioned his socio-economic status did so in relationship to peer relationships and not as a factor in his underachievement. The majority of subjects (including the two who alluded to a possible relationship between family problems and poor grades) made clear positive statements of family support ("My mother really understands," "my sisters and I are best friends").

The pattern to emerge from an examination of student perceptions of the relationship between their underachievement and family dynamics is one of limited perception on the part of the adolescent subjects of a possible relationship between their family lives and their academic performance.

The Role of the School in Gifted Underachievement

Error in Measurement

Error in measurement is cited as a school-related factor when identifying gifted students. All subjects perceived themselves as gifted; all perceived themselves as underachieving. None of the subjects mentioned possible error on the part of those responsible for identifying them as gifted as being a reason for their underachievement.

Ineffective Teaching

While no one school-related factor cited in the general literature appeared to be critical for a majority of the students as they perceived it, each of the factors was important to at least one student and it appeared appropriate to include a number of factors under the rubric of ineffective teaching. Ineffective teaching, which includes a) assigning "busy work" as homework, b) assigning repetitive tasks and work, c) assigning long-term, dull projects, d) lack of challenging curriculum, e) lack of know-

ledge of subject matter, f) teacher lack of ability to recognize student mastery of a topic, g) lack of respect for student opinion, and h) teacher dislike of a student was perceived by the students as a deterrent to achievement and was mentioned by them when they talked about why they underachieved academically.

Relevance of Curriculum

The subjects talked about the relationship between the academic curriculum and those issues they considered important world challenges. More than half of the subjects indicated that there was no real relationship between the world issues they saw as important to world survival and their school lives. "I just don't know how school reflects in any way. These are problems. We don't discuss these problems."

At the same time, the majority of the students said that the purpose of education was preparation for life ("to get somewhere," "to be a good citizen"). However, only one of the subjects said that preparation for college, as a function of education, was preparation for life. On a more specific level, the majority of the sample stated that they were academically weak in the area of mathematics and commented on the lack of connection they saw between mastery of algebra or calculus and the realities of their future lives

("you don't need calculus to balance a checkbook"). The perceived mathematics weakness of the sample is inconsistent with the findings in the underachievement literature which state that the gifted underachiever tends to prefer, and to do better in math than in other subjects.

Summary

The gifted underachiever underachieves, according to the literature, because of a combination of factors within the student, the family, and the school. The factors that have been isolated for consideration have been those perceived by a majority of the sample to agree or disagree with the prevailing expert opinions. It must be remembered that each of these factors does not occur in a vacuum but is interrelated with the others and is isolated only for purposes of examination. It might also be noted that the subjects did not compare themselves with their achieving counterparts or with one another, although they were asked to describe their perceptions of how others might see them.

Subject perceptions regarding the student are in agreement with the literature regarding the lack of academic motivation and lack of career plans and goals. In so far as the gifted underachieving sample could be said to have a social orientation (in that they were people rather than

work or school focused), and global social perspective, are also in agreement with the prevailing literature.

They are in opposition to the literature, in terms of social maturity and social isolation. Subject perceptions regarding their self concept also appeared to disagree with the prevailing literature; focusing on a changing perspective of self rather than a specific set of statements regarding self concept and/or self esteem. In contrast to the literature, they did not appear, in general, to perceive their family situation as having a relationship to their underachievement.

The subjects were generally in agreement with the gifted literature when they cited ineffective teaching and lack of challenging curriculum as factors within the school that fostered underachievement. They did not believe error in measurement, for them, was a factor in their underachievement. They were in opposition to the literature in that they perceived mathematics as their weakest subject.

A summary of the student perceptions regarding themselves and their underachievement presents a picture of young people who appear to have a good self concept except perhaps in regard to their underachievement, which affects the subjects perceptions of themselves negatively when it impacts on those for whom they care. Their view of self

appears to be based on their descriptions of themselves and their perceptions of their competencies and roles. They appear to perceive themselves from a social rather than an academic or career orientation.

They acknowledge their giftedness and their underachievement, which in some cases is a conscious choice, and they also recognize the academic and personal consequences which may result from the underachievement. They feel however, that their worth as people is not based on their academic performance.

Consistent with the literature, they are motivated to produce in arenas other than the academic, primarily in the visual and performing arts and in athletic endeavors. Lack of motivation is perceived by them to be caused by either school-related or personal factors. They are motivated to remain in school despite their poor grades. They have few, if any, long range life or career goals, although college attendance is mentioned as a future goal.

They acknowledge some difficulties in family relationships, but are more apt to speak of their families in positive terms. They do not say that there is any connection between their family dynamics and their underachievement.

The subjects do say there is a connection between ineffective teaching and their lack of performance. In addition their statements indicate a lack of connection be-

tween their perception of (a) the major challenges facing the world today, (b) the general purpose of education, (c) the curriculum as it stands in their schools, and (d) the realities of their current or future lives.

Research Question # 4
Are there Identity Development Patterns Common to Some Gifted Adolescents in which the Academic Underachievement Phenomenon Appears to Play an Identifiable Role?

Research Question #4 was analyzed within the context of the Eriksonian concept of human development as discussed in Chapter 2. Erikson postulates that the major task of the adolescent is the development of an identity, which at its optimum "is experienced merely as a sense of psychosocial well being" (p. 165). Identity is concerned with being at home in one's body, knowledge of where one is going (educational goals, career goals, personal goals), and a knowledge that others (family, teachers, peer, and teachers) recognize and care for one. According to Erikson, adolescents need to develop "a clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligible theory" (1980, 1959, p.153), based on a historical perspective of life, and referred to as an ideology.

Identity development is considered an active process, triggered by a "crisis" that must be resolved. The way in which the individual copes with the crisis (with input from the environment) determines the extent to which positive or negative growth and change occur. Successful resolution of the crisis, according to Erikson, results in a strong positive sense of self; unsuccessful resolution results in a negative sense of self. When there is no resolution, the

young person appears to be diffused, unable to "take hold." There may also be a delay in the resolution process, which Erikson defines as a moratorium. In addition, Erikson states that each developmental stage may incorporate a re-structuring and reworking of earlier stage tasks within the context of the individual's current life stage and within the individual's expanding environment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on the three components of optimal identity development (of being at home with one's body, having goals in regard to education and career, and anticipating recognition from those who care), as well as on the clarity of the subjects' ideological comprehension of life and the relationship between the educational environment and identity perception. The data were found primarily in Interview Categories 5 and 2 ("Relationship of Life Experience to Educational and Personal Identity" and "Perceptions of Self"; see Appendix C).

Being At Home With One's Body

Only four of the eleven subjects mentioned their bodies in any manner during the interview. When asked to describe themselves, none of the subjects spoke of themselves in physical terms (height, weight, coloring etc.) although one

did say, with a grin, "what you see and everything else." Two males and one female said that they did not like to sit for long periods of time, but appeared to accept that part of themselves. Two spoke of their bodies in connection with skate-boarding; skateboarding allowed one subject to break "physical rules" while the other said skateboarding "keeps me from turning into a little ball of fat."

The three female subjects smoked continually during the interview; it might be inferred from this activity that these subjects are, if not uncomfortable with their bodies, disrespectful of their physical selves.

Subjects' responses appeared more closely connected to a larger personal perspective, of feeling at home with one's entire self, which would include the physical body. The gifted ability to conceptualize and abstract might explain the responses. It might also be remembered from the initial questions regarding self that the students answered those questions in terms of characteristics and behaviors rather than feelings. Responses at this level of questioning appeared to be answered in terms of feelings, rather than characteristics and behaviors. Each of the four students who did describe themselves briefly in terms of body also spoke about themselves in another way.

Seven of the subjects described themselves in terms of change. Three mentioned that they had changed in some way

("I changed a lot. I was a different person many times over;" "The things I change are the things I can change"). Two indicated that change is taking place in their lives ("It's my nature to wonder and think. Without it, I wouldn't wonder, would change my whole life"). Two intimated that a change process was in their thoughts ("the way I'd like to be," "anxious to do new things") while one student said that he was unable to change his situation ("I can't change the world") so would make the most of it. The remaining four students did not mention personal change at all (100% of the females and one male).

Comfort with the self was determined by the positive or negative statements the subjects made about themselves. Six students spoke positively about themselves. Comments included, "I trust myself," "I feel pretty positive about myself. The things I change [about myself] are the things I can change," and

> If you can create a universe out of what
> you see around you which includes feelings
> and shadings, then you've got to be something,
> just being a sentient creature, not a plant;
> you can think. That's a pretty good feeling too.

One student said quietly, "I feel good about myself knowing I can hold down a job," and also mentioned her positive feelings about specific pieces of woodwork she had made in school.

Three students appeared to be changing in a positive manner regarding their comfort with themselves. One discussed his perceptions of his current feelings regarding minority groups and the way he would like to feel about people. He indicated that it was difficult for him to enter a highly urban environment with its cultural and ethnic diversity and feel comfortable; he did not like the feeling and was actively trying to come to grips with it. Another student said that "I used to think I was inferior...but [you got] to realize you were just as good as they were," describing his feelings about himself when he entered his current school system from an extremely rural background and his feelings about himself at the present time.

Two students expressed feelings about themselves, explaining them in situational rather than personal terms. One student felt that since he had no control over the world arms situation that he was "going to live it up and have as much fun as I can." He indicated that he was happy with himself and his life. The second student (a serious musician) reflected that he was "anxious" to get on to new experiences, but felt that the school system was holding him back.

One student described herself negatively; she felt like a loser and said that extracurricular success in music did not offset the negative feeling. The last time she felt

"really good" about herself, she said, was the time she participated in a summer program for gifted students because, "even though there were other kids there smarter than me, I never felt inferior." The eleventh student did not mention any feelings of comfort or discomfort with her body or her self except to say that she was "bored."

Two of the six students who said they were comfortable with themselves indicated that they had changed in some way. Two did not comment on the change process in their lives; one appeared to be in the process of change, and one felt he had no power to change his situation. The three students who inferred a changing sense of self all used the word change when describing themselves. One indicated he had changed, particularly in his feelings about his value as a person, while the other two subjects spoke about personal change in the future. The remaining two subjects, both females made no comment about the change process in their lives, describing themselves negatively or not at all (See Table 12).

Education and Career Goals

The eleven subjects gave seventeen responses to questions regarding their future education and/or career. No subject had a clearly mapped plan of action based on a

Table 12

Relationship of
Perception of Change and
Perception of Degree of Self Comfort

	Have experienced change	Changing	No change
Comfortable with self	2	1	3
Positive sense of change in comfort level		3	
Uncomfortable with self or neutral			2

chosen career path, although one appeared to recognize the financial and academic considerations involved in her current choice of life work. Nine of the subjects anticipated that they would be attending college at some time in their lives; a tenth attends college now. Four believed they would go to college directly after high school graduation. One student planned to use the armed forces as the entree to his college education, while another has parental support for a year or so of an outward bound type of experience prior to college matriculation. One student will attend college "if I graduate." She was specific in discussing the institution she will attend, citing cost, family obligations, and institutional excellence in her chosen field.

One student, at his mother's urging, was prepared to spend a post-graduate year "somewhere" before attending college. The ninth student said, "Maybe, in the future," and then, in a low tone, "it depends on having children."

The three female students presented somewhat specific career goals (hairdressing, restaurant management, child care), although each goal statement was followed by "I think." Two did not have any plans formulated toward reaching those particular career goals; one perceived the need for post-secondary education in early childhood development to realize her dream of "running a day care center." One did say that her five year goal was "to have a steady job." Another perceived marriage and a family as short term goals.

Three students spoke to possible careers based on one or more of their personal interests. One student mentioned "stocks and bonds," the second spoke to a synthesis of writing, journalism, and bio-engineering, while the third was debating the merits of physics, hypnosis, computers, and money management. This subject also perceived his long term life goal to be "scientific discovery."

Three students, including the one currently attending college, said they had no career plans in mind.

> My thing is supposed to be going through school to prepare for going to college. I still have to figure out how and where. I just don't know. Career? Win the lottery! I don't have a clue. Not in the world.
>
> I don't care what I do. You mean a real career? I never really thought about this. I won't do something I hate.

The remaining two students were looking for a period of time in which to make a decision about their futures. "I want to do some other things, to put a repertoire behind me. At one point I want to be allowed to pause, to go off on my own path without being hindered. I've a feeling that I'm always going to have the hindrance of what other people are looking for." The second student said he was "trying to get my future straightened out" and that he could not understand "how some kids can say I want to be this or that. I just want to keep as many doors open as I can" (See Table 13).

Recognition From Those Who Count

Recognition, both positive and negative, from those who count was discussed by ten of the subjects. Eight subjects spoke specifically to family members and their importance, three mentioned peers, and one mentioned her employer. Recognition from family members was found to be important in thirteen of the nineteen responses.

Four considered their parents to be important to their development. "I consider myself very secure and self confi-

Table 13

Relationship between
Life and Career Goals and
Plans to Attend College

	In college now	after high school	sometime in future	no
specific life goals	0	0	0	0
Possible career choices		1	1	1
Vague career thoughts		1	2	
No choices stated	1		2	
Perception of need for additional time to develop goals			2	

---

dent, and that's stuff attributed to them." One student said, "Sometimes they care too much," and then went on to say that "if parents don't care--if kids love and their parents don't love back--that is a bad situation." On the other hand, one student was dissatisfied with his family; they appear to have little in common in his eyes and "they don't have much effect (on me). I'm pretty separate." One student focused on her mother's support and recognition. "She just listens and understands," and then acknowledged the importance of her home life as it plays out in home-sickness. "When it gets down to it, I always miss it here."

Recognition from peers, in the form of friendship, was mentioned by three subjects as being important to them. "Good friends are important; not a lot of friends, but a few good ones."

Recognition from employers was mentioned by only one subject (fear of negative recognition due to the subject dropping out of school) even though several subjects were working at the time of the interview and three perceived the role of worker to have meaning for them. The subject spoke in an angry tone when she mentioned the possibility of being fired from her job because she would no longer be a student, but a member of the job pool without a high school diploma. In addition, none of the subjects spoke directly about the importance of recognition from teachers or school administrators, although an allusion was made about the general importance of academicians since "they judge you by your scores."

Reworking the Developmental Stages

Each of the subjects talked about their feelings concerning themselves, their vague career and life goals, and the importance of recognition from others, both explicitly and implicitly. They did not say explicitly at any time, "I am in the process of developing an identity," nor did they say explicitly, "I am working out unfinished developmental

issues." However, review of the transcripts gave evidence of implicit statements regarding the completion of (or re-appropriating of) previous issues within the context of the adolescent task of identity development.

Erikson (1968) states that trust plays out in terms of familial affection and communication at the adolescent level, while issues of autonomy may be perceived in the context of rebellion, delinquency (expressed by "shameless defiance of gangs," p.109), or self doubt as the adolescent seeks to make independent decisions regarding self and life. The adolescent needs an individual or community to give "scope" to his/her potential. Initiative, at the adolescent level, is explored within the context of either living up to the individual's potential or living within the "restrictions which keep one from living up to potential" (p.120). The sense of industry, or doing things well (competence), may need re-working if "nothing he has learned to do well seems to count with his fellows or teachers" (p.124). The sense of industry is exemplified during the high school years by the need to find an occupation.

Academic underachievement, in the gifted adolescent, might represent a generic working out of one or more issues of autonomy, initiative and industry. However, for this sample, the underachievement was not examined as a factor in

influencing remaining early issues since it is common to all subjects.

Trust as a major issue was indicated by such comments as "I wish I could call my stepmother Mom; my sisters do, even when she is angry," and "My mother trusts me, my father doesn't." Autonomy was considered a major unresolved issue when dress and behaviors differed significantly from the norm or when subjects made strong statements about self doubt ("I just don't know who I am"). Initiative, or living up to potential, was considered an issue when statements such as "I'm a goof-off," or "I guess I don't work up to potential" were made. Consistent references to meaningful work and its importance were used as the basis for considering industry as a major unresolved issue. Identity development itself was considered the main issue when subjects made well thought out conceptual references to the self and to change ("I have changed a lot"). The emergence of a significant other and the place of that other in the total life picture of a subject was considered evidence of emergence of the issue of intimacy as important to one subject.

The eleven subjects presented fifteen points of concentration in five developmental areas (See Table 14).

Table 14
Relationship between
Perceptions of Core Self and
the Re-working of Earlier Developmental Issues

Developmental Issues	Core Sense of Self			
	Evolving	Externally defined	Un-defined	Possible transition state
Trust	1		1	
Autonomy	1	3		
Initiative		1	2	1
Industry			1	1
Identity	4			
Intimacy			1	

Seven subjects appeared to be working through one primary task while four subjects gave evidence of working out two issues at the same time. The four subjects who appeared to be clearly working out identity issues were the four males who defined themselves as "evolving" when asked to describe themselves. Two of these males were also re-working a second issue (trust and autonomy). Four subjects were concerned with issues of autonomy; two appeared to be mildly rebellious in their dress and other body ornamentation, while two indicated self doubt. Three subjects were concerned with issues of initiative and one with industry.

One female subject appeared to be working out issues of intimacy along with initiative, while initiative and autonomy were issues for another subject.

Summary

The identity development process as envisioned by Erikson, may be said to be complete at the adolescent level when the following three issues are resolved within a beginning ideological framework: feeling at home with one's body, having educational and career goals, and anticipating recognition from those who count.

Only four subjects mentioned the physical self. All subjects discussed themselves in a broader context of characteristics, behaviors and feelings. At this point in the interview, they discussed feelings about the self more clearly than when they had been asked to describe themselves. More than half of the subjects indicated there was a change process involved in the way they perceived themselves that resulted in perception of the self in a more positive manner.

None of the subjects had clear, well planned, long term goals for their future education or for a career, although nine of the subjects anticipated college attendance in the future (with a tenth in college now), and one did have knowledge of what was involved if she was to pursue her

general career goal. Two students stated openly that they felt the need for time to make long-term decisions.

Recognition from family members was considered important for eight of the subjects. Recognition from teachers was not mentioned by any of the subjects as being important to them, although reference was made to those who judge individuals by the results of test scores.

A number of subjects appeared to be re-working earlier developmental issues that either took precedence over the immediate task of identity formation or that were being re-examined in light of the current identity development process. It was not possible to determine the precise nature of the phenomenon from the available data.

Ideology

The development of an ideology, or "clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligible theory" was addressed within the context of activities and events that had major positive and negative significance for the subjects during their lives, the challenges that the subjects perceive to be important in the world today, and the relationship of the above activities and challenges and the academic milieu to their lives.

An assumption was held that student perceptions of life activities and life challenges would provide them with a beginning philosophy of life grounded to a certain extent in a personal and societal perspective "for the social institution which is the guardian of identity is what we have called ideology" (Erikson, 1968, p.133).

Major Challenges Facing People Today

The major challenges facing people today as perceived by the subjects evoked twenty-two responses. Two students perceived one major issue of import, seven students were aware of two major issues, and two students believed there were three major challenges facing people today.

The majority of responses were focused on human issues--world-wide, national, or personal. Nine students provided eleven responses. Six students were concerned with human acceptance of one another, phrased in such terms as equity, equality ("both biological and social"), and racism. "The barriers we put up between ourselves and others; we need to be accepting of people as we are." Four spoke about world hunger. One subject, after reflection on responsibility for hunger said, "There is enough food. So maybe it's more, maybe feeding people which is actually overcoming greed...maybe overcoming greed is the major challenge." One student in this cluster perceived drug and alcohol abuse to

be a major problem, with local rather than global implications.

Five subjects believed that nuclear war was a major issue of today. Two of the students couched their comments in terms of world peace, while a third said that "the arms race [is a problem] and that has to do with trust. Have to learn to trust people more so the second challenge is to learn to trust." The remaining student talked of the importance of preventing nuclear war and/or another world war. Three of the students who spoke of world peace also found hunger to be a major challenge.

Three students were concerned about environmental issues, including energy use and overpopulation. One student mentioned a variety of environmental issues and then said he thought, "in general that our hand has touched almost every part of the world; some way or another it (the world) is affected by us. Yet its got to be utilized, resources and all..."

Two students saw challenges in a more personal light. One student said, for him, the major challenge was "deciding what to do when you're forty years old when you're only sixteen and don't know all that much about it." This student also discussed the challenge involved when governments put "economics and the business of running a country above the people."

The issue of the state of the economy was important for one student. The issue was labeled a personal one because she discussed the economic situation in terms of its effect on her and on her life ie: ability to purchase a home, to marry and raise a family. This student also spoke to the issue of peace as a major challenge.

Activities and Events that gave Positive Meaning to their Lives

Activities and/or events that gave positive meaning to their lives accounted for thirteen responses from the eleven subjects. The responses were concrete; they addressed pleasurable activities within the subjects' immediate lives, but did not explicitly address the development of a religious, political, or social theory by which they organized (or planned to organize) their lives. Nine subjects gave one response; two provided two answers. Four students said that athletic activity of some sort was important to them. Swimming, skate-boarding, tennis,and skiing were mentioned.

Cognitive activities that stretched the mind were mentioned as being important by six students. Three subjects said that a summer program for the gifted they had attended during their middle school years had a major impact on their lives. For two of the female students this was the only life activity they found to have positive

meaning. Reading was important to one student because "it lets me get into other's minds, broadens my horizons and lets me see other points of view." Role playing games were considered cognitive activities and were important to two students. "Dungeons & Dragons taught me to think creatively, to spell, to write. I learned more from D & D than I did from school." Travel ("It opens you up more; there's so much to see out there"), music (in many forms), and work were the activities that held the most meaning for the remaining three students.

It might be noted here that none of the subjects mentioned any facet of their public school experience as having major meaning or importance in their lives. The student who mentioned skiing as a meaningful activity had attended ski camp as a summer recreational activity; his school does not have a ski team.

Activities that held Little Meaning or left the Subjects Dissatisfied

Activities that held little meaning or left the subjects dissatisfied provided a more diverse mix of responses. The eleven subjects mentioned fifteen different activities. Three said that nothing in their lives had left them dissatisfied. One maintained that position throughout the interview, inconsistent with her distress at not having job at present. This particular subject had said repeatedly

that she "feels good" when she is working; it enables her to be independent. One subject added "nothing that I haven't gotten over," but did not elaborate even when encouraged. The third eventually said that being cut from a team was the life event that left him most dissatisfied with himself.

Seven responses (from seven students) were connected with an organized group activity (four of which were school related and involved being eliminated from a team or other extracurricular activity). One student just said, "I was never any good at team sports." 4-H, specialty resident camp, and Cub Scouts were unhappy experiences for three students. The subjects cited structure of the experience and repetition of activities or tasks as primary reasons for disliking the experience. Two of these students were female, and two had also attended the summer gifted program which they claimed held much meaning for them.

Two students were dissatisfied with school in general, "haven't liked it since grade three." The total of school-place-related responses, including the four organized school activities, numbered six, and included five students.

Three students mentioned family issues as being major sources of dissatisfaction, citing regrets over not knowing a biological parent, concerns about current relationships with one or both parents and/or step-parents, and for one

subject, disappointment that she had specifically been forbidden by her parents to play Youth League Ice Hockey when she was younger. It might be noted that family related responses increased to six when the three organized group activities were included. While each subject mentioned the experience itself as a major source of dissatisfaction in their lives, in each case they stated that their parents had made them participate in the activity. The student who attended resident camp spoke about tear-stained letters home and then said, "They made me go for three years. I hated it all."

None of the subjects mentioned either grades or their academic underachievement as being a life activity that left them unhappy or dissatisfied, although two did mention school in general and four spoke to athletic activity that may or may not have taken place within the school environment as being negative experiences. At the same time, none of the subjects said that public school was a major meaningful experience in their lives. It may be worth noting that athletic activities were a positive experience for three students, a negative experience for two students, and a major experience in both positive and negative ways for one. In addition, there may be some import to student perceptions regarding the negative impact on them of struc-

tured organized activities versus the positive impact of the less structured summer gifted program.

Discussion and Summary

Student perspectives on major challenges in the world indicated that they held a long term view of the relationships (between peoples, and between people and the environment) necessary for continued global existence. They indicated an awareness of governmental processes and of societal relationships between countries, as well as an awareness of the difference between person-to-person life interaction and government-to-government interaction; and appeared to feel some personal responsibility to alleviate the situation.

Their perspectives on life activities that have left them dissatisfied indicated a personal awareness of the nature of interpersonal relationships within the family and larger communities. However, they did not appear to have grounded this interpersonal awareness in a philosophy of human relationships. At the same time they did not perceive their underachievement as an activity that left them dissatisfied, although several students had stated earlier that their underachievement bothered them to a certain extent.

Their perspectives on the events or activities in their lives that gave their lives meaning were concrete, focusing

primarily on activities that gave them immediate satisfaction. The activities themselves used physical or mental energy directed toward developing a personal skill. A number of subjects did indicate that activities and events that fostered development of their cognitive skills were also important. In general, the adolescent subjects did not focus on past life experiences (family situations etc.) that might impact either their current or their future lives, nor did they indicate that there was any ideological quality to the events and activities that had given their lives meaning.

The subjects' notions of world challenges indicated a development of a beginning ideology in regard to global issues. They indicated an awareness of dissatisfaction with some interpersonal issues in their lives, but discussed only concrete activities with immediate satisfaction as having a positive impact on their lives. It might be said that a tenuous developmental connection exists among the three categories in that the activities they perceived as positive life experiences foster comfort with the physical and cognitive self, activities perceived to cause dissatisfaction perhaps indicate the development of interpersonal social relationship awareness, and the challenges perceived by the

respondents to be important in today's world indicate awareness of a global set of social and environmental constructs within which they may conduct their lives.

Environmental Milieu

Erikson acknowledges the interrelationship of the environment and the developing young person. One common adolescent environment is the public secondary school. Data concerning the academic environment was analyzed to determine its role in regard to development of identity in the gifted underachiever. The subjects were asked for their perceptions about the purpose of education in general and the purpose of education in their schools. They were also asked to describe their personal ideal school. In addition, the students were asked how they felt they learned best, what relationship (if any) they saw between their perceptions of major challenges facing people today and their school curriculum, and the extent to which school helped form their self concept.

The Purpose of Education

Questions regarding the purpose of education elicited thirteen responses. Nine subjects mentioned one purpose; two subjects mentioned two general educational purposes.

The responses fell into four areas. Seven students said that the purpose of education was to provide training for life. Four of these mentioned general training ("to get somewhere in life," "to prepare for living") while three were more specific (to be a good citizen, to become responsible, to do what one is told). It might be noted that only one student thought that preparation for college, as a function of education, was preparation for life. Three subjects thought the purpose of education was to provide a common level of competence for everyone ("bring everyone to an equal level"). Two students believed the purpose of education was to instill in the learner an appreciation of learning, while the final student, somewhat tongue in cheek, remarked that the purpose of education was to "provide jobs for teachers," an economic purpose.

Educational Purpose Within a School

Six subjects found that their schools were successful in meeting an ideal educational purpose as they perceived it. One subject found his high school successful in meeting its educational goals ("same as the ideal--good job") while a second gave a more qualified answer when judging the school's success ("The vocational center is doing a good job"). Three felt their school(s) was trying to meet ideal goals ("trying to do their best") and one felt his school

was average ("It has to be there to have you learn"). Three students perceived that their schools were not trying to work toward an ideal academic purpose. "They keep you there because you're supposed to go to high school," said one, while another said clearly, "The main purpose should be to prepare you for living but it seems that it is really to prepare you for further education which is a specialty." Two students said they could not answer the question or could not see a purpose within their school.

Nine students perceived some purpose to their secondary school. Six of the nine believed their school was trying, at the least, to meet an ideal purpose. The student perceptions of general educational purpose and what their schools were trying to do appeared to be congruent. A comparison between the two schools (rural (R) population of six, and urban (C) population of five) revealed that four rural students believed their school was trying to meet an ideal purpose while only two urban students believed that. Two urban students felt their school was not meeting an ideal purpose while only one rural student expressed the negative view. Each population had one student who felt unable to respond to the question.

The Ideal School

The subjects perceived the ideal school to have one or more of four general components: (a) the plant or physical environment, (four students, six responses), (b) school administration (two students, three responses), (c) class content (nine students, ten responses), and (d) the learning environment or classroom process (eight students, fourteen responses). The eleven subjects provided thirty three responses to the question, an average of three per student. Twenty four of the responses were concerned with classroom content or classroom process.

The Physical Environment. The actual place where learning would take place was important to three students. One felt that there shouldn't be a "school," but rather a series of "education buildings." Another wanted to have "no layers of brick. I'd make it more interesting, carpet, real stuff," and went on to say "Public school kids don't need to be comfortable. They're just [here] to learn so just give them what we can afford." The third student said with a big smile, "ah, move it to the tennis court; read this chapter and serve 'em up," but went on to say that he probably wouldn't do much academic learning that way. Two students laughed, but said they were serious when they stated that their ideal school would start much later in the day, and

one added that recess should be a component of school throughout the twelve years.

School Administration. The two students who spoke about administrative issues were speaking of teacher excellence. They wanted teacher exchanges with other cultures, a wide range of specialists in each academic field and "more stringent hiring practices."

Class Content. Nine students discussed the issue of class content. Five of the nine wanted more curricular options (For me, more languages") although they were not all specific ("If people could go their own way and enjoy, learn what they want to learn, it would be less stressful and they would be happier, because they are funneled into an unhappy pattern of life"). The grading system--which was included as part of class content because grades are an observable measure of subject mastery--was mentioned by four students, with changes ranging from elimination of all grades to restructuring the system to pass-fail. One subject said that for him, the ideal school would have "no work."

Learning Environment. The eight students who found the learning environment to be an issue for them mentioned the right to learn at their own pace, the need for increased social interaction, and working in groups from the early elementary years with as little supervision as possible

because "if you do, then you can deal with freedom better as you get older." If students are not allowed to work independently until the high school years, this student said, "they wouldn't deal with it because they have been told what to do all their lives."

Two students said their ideal school would be like another school they had either heard of or had attended. In each case, learning at one's own pace and freedom of academic choice (coupled with responsibility for that choice) were integral to the school philosophy. When asked what was important to him about the school he had attended, one student replied, "I don't know. It's the only time I ever actually had a good time and learned. It was just a lot easier to learn. Like, this is the key question to the whole thing and I DON'T KNOW!"

Eight of the process responses addressed more personal needs, using such words and phrases as "encouragement," "Emphasize the individual," "more respect for kids' ideas," and "start from the beginning with questions about life; when you start young you have curiosity and you have pride if you keep curiosity going."

The nature of the responses indicated that expanded opportunity for learning and how this learning takes place are important to these gifted underachievers. When class content and class process issues were combined, they ac-

counted for twenty four of the total number of responses and were mentioned by ten of the eleven subjects. No student mentioned academic products directly. While the subjects did mention their need for more classroom options, they were not specific in stating what options they desired. Administratively, the perceived need for teacher specialists and teacher exchanges might also be considered as an additional content option. The one student who did not address content or process needs mentioned only a desire to have a different physical setting and time schedule. This student is the one student who said that his school was successfully addressing the general purposes of education as he perceived them, "doing a good job."

Learning Styles

Examination of the ways in which the subjects said that they learned best indicated that six perceive themselves to process and retain information in more than one way. four of these have two primary modes of learning and two students perceive that they learn best in a three way combination of input. Four subjects said they believe they have one major means of learning, while one subject discussed factors that motivate her to learn, but did not identify a mode of learning that was helpful to her. In addition, the subjects

listed in order they way they perceived they mastered material.

The following modes of learning were mentioned; sight (seven subjects), speech (five subjects), hearing (two subjects), and touch (four subjects). Sight included reading, writing, and visualization in the form of films, diagrams etc., while hearing included listening to material and memorization (inner listening). Speech included both talking and discussion.

Two subjects perceived that they learned primarily by touch ("fooling with a gadget; fool around till something happens"), although one provided the caveat that it should "pertain to something real." One subject said she learned mainly by sight (reading and then visually remembering it) and another learned by talking. The remaining six subjects saw their learning patterns as a three or four step process, ie: reading, doing, re-reading, and visualization. "I have to read about it, then do it, then read about it some more. I love diagrams." This subject also indicated that learning is enhanced for him when he is with someone who is exciting.

The major pattern appeared to be a minimum combination of sight and speech for four of the six students who perceived more than one mode of learning. The remaining two subjects combined sight and touch. Only two students men-

tioned listening as being helpful to them. However, five students said they learned by speaking or discussing; presumably, listening is a component of the discussion process.

Relationship between life challenges and learning

The subjects were asked their perceptions regarding the relationship between the challenges they identified as being important to people today and what they were learning in school. Seven students indicated that there was no real relationship between the challenges and their educational process. "I just don't see how school reflects in any way. Education is just education; to bring us up to the same standards. These are problems. We don't discuss these problems," and "Absolutely none! They don't. There's no connection between them" were typical responses.

Two of the remaining four found an academic connection to their perceived challenge. The economic situation, in the opinion of one student, led to budget cuts with subsequent drop in quality of materials and teachers. One student found the issue of biological and social equality (a challenge) a motivating factor as he thought about possible college studies and career.

Personal connections between school and life challenges were mentioned by two students. One student found his

perception of global human tolerance (his challenge) was connected to his perceptions of social alienation from some peers, while the second was certain that there was some relationship between his confusion regarding educational purpose, career, and future and the way in which the guidance department in his school was staffed. The student appeared to see the connection as an interpersonal one rather than an issue of academics. He said, referring to a guidance counselor, "He doesn't do a lot for me, but there's maybe a hundred other kids he sees."

Impact of School of Self Concept

The subjects seemed clear as they addressed their perceived impact of school on their concept of self. Three found school had a positive effect on themselves, saying such things as "my concept of myself is someone who would like to help other people. School teaches me to deal with other people." One student spoke at length about the relationship between school, his underachievement, and his self concept.

> School formed it a lot, because not doing well but feeling that I was not an idiot had a major effect. How I did in school gave me a lot of my ideas that are my philosophy now. I didn't particularly like the school, but I feel OK about the ideas I was given. I didn't like what they said but it made me draw other conclusions.

Three students found that school had a negative effect on their self concept, saying that it "shelters" them from "finding themselves," and that it "gets in the way" of the activities they want to pursue. While four subjects stated that school had no effect at all on their sense of self, their statements were quite different. One said, in a flat tone, "None. I just go day by day," while another said that his school behavior was a reflection of his self, rather than his self being molded by the school. "In a way," he said, "it reflects my personality." As stated earlier, the remaining student said that school had both a positive and negative effect on her self concept.

The subjects' perceptions of the impact of school on their self concept, their perceived comfort with themselves, and the change process were compared (See Tables 15 and 16). The comparison revealed that for the three students who said that school had a positive impact on their self concept, all three had experienced change within themselves, and all indicated either a positive or changing sense of self. Three of the four subjects who said school had no impact on their self concept indicated that they had a positive sense of themselves. The fourth did not comment. One female did not comment on either sense of self or change. The three students who mentioned that school had a negative impact on their self concept all mentioned change in a variety of

Table 15

Relationship of Subjects' Perception of Change and School's Impact on Self Concept

Perceived impact of school upon self concept	Perceived experience of change		
	Have experienced change	Changing	No change
Positive	3	0	0
Neutral	3	0	1
Negative	0	3	0
Positive and Negative	0	0	1

Table 16

Relationship of Subjects' Feelings About Self and School's Impact on Self Concept

Perceived impact of school upon self concept	Feelings About Self		
	Positive	Changing	Negative
Positive	2	1	0
Neutral	3	0	No comment
Negative	1	2	0
Positive and Negative	0	0	1

ways. Two appeared to be in the process of change regarding the sense of self while the third expressed a positive sense of self.

Three students indicated that change had taken place within their lives. All three of these students expressed the belief that school had a positive effect on their self concept; two were comfortable with themselves, while one appeared to be in the process of changing his feelings about himself. Both of the students who indicated that there were intimations of change within their lives felt that school had a negative impact on their self concept and that they were in the process of changing their feelings about themselves.

Summary

The identity development process as envisioned by Erikson, may be said to be complete at the adolescent level when the following three issues are resolved within a beginning ideological framework: feeling at home with one's body, having educational and career goals, and anticipating recognition from those who count. For some subjects, the task of identity development appeared to include the re-framing of earlier, unresolved developmental issues, either delaying the current developmental task, or re-working the

earlier issue within the context of the adolescent experience.

Only four subjects mentioned the physical self. All subjects discussed themselves in a broader context of characteristics, behaviors and feelings. At this point in the interview, they discussed feelings about the self more clearly than when they had been asked to describe themselves. More than half of the subjects indicated there was a change process involved in the way they perceived themselves that resulted in perception of the self in a more positive manner.

None of the subjects had clear, well planned, long term goals for their future education or for a career, although nine of the subjects anticipated college attendance in the future (with a tenth in college now), and one did have knowledge of what was involved if she was to pursue her general career goal. Two students stated openly that they felt the need for time to make long-term decisions.

Recognition from family members was considered important for eight of the subjects. Recognition from teachers was not mentioned by any of the subjects as being important to them, although reference was made to those who judge individuals by the results of test scores.

Analysis of the activities and events in the lives of the subjects that fostered happiness or dissatisfaction

found a variety of cognitive activities to be important to six subjects, while athletic activities, primarily of an individual nature, were important to four subjects. Athletic activities had a positive or negative effect on more than half of the students. Negative impact appeared to be related to team situations. Organized, structured activities (whether school related or not) left seven subjects dissatisfied. While family crises were a major source of dissatisfaction for only three subjects, eight found recognition from family to be important to them. No student said that public secondary school was a meaningful experience in his/her life; no student mentioned grades or academic underachievement as a life experience resulting in dissatisfaction even though all the students have been labeled underachieving, some students had said that they were concerned about their underachievement, and one said that her self concept was poor, in part due to her underachievement. It may be inferred that the subjects did not appear to perceive their school experience as a central life experience.

The perceived major challenges facing people today were those of individual and global human interaction and acceptance, and the challenges involved in maintaining world peace. The subjects acknowledged the responsibility of the

individual in fostering human equality and world peace. They perceived little or no relationship between the educational process as they experienced it and the challenges facing the world today, although some subjects mentioned a relationship between the development of their personal philosophies and their perception of world issues.

Most students believed the general purpose of education was to prepare the individual for "life" or to bring people to a common level of understanding. Only one student thought that preparation for college was part of preparation for life. They felt, in general, that their schools were trying (and for the most part were at least somewhat successful) in meeting the perceived general educational purpose.

The ideal school, as the subjects perceived it, would not contain any major structural changes (except perhaps for starting later), but would have a wider variety of curricular options and would take place in a learning environment that stressed development of intellectual curiosity through respectful student-teacher-group interaction. The nature of subject learning styles did not appear to be related to their perceived notions regarding an ideal school. The nature of the student-teacher relationship, the learning process, and the quality of content were considered important to the subjects, while classroom projects, papers,

and grades were not mentioned by any of the subjects in terms of describing an ideal school.

The majority of subjects said that school had either a negative impact or no impact on their self concept. When compared to their general self-concept (as expressed in feelings about the self), only one subject stated that she felt negatively about herself. (One other student did not respond to the question). The majority of subjects were either positive about themselves or said that they felt they were changing in a positive way. Only two students mentioned underachievement as a factor in their perception of themselves; one said it was positive and the other saw the negative aspects of academic underachievement outweighing the positive effects of extracurricular school success. The female subjects perceived themselves more negatively than the male subjects. One felt positive about herself only in relationship to work, one was clear in saying that she had negative feelings about herself, and the third female did not answer the question.

Determining Identity Status

The Eriksonian concept of identity development has been operationalized by Marcia (See Chapter 2, p. 74) into four "concentration points" in which the adolescent displays "individual styles of coping with the psychosocial task of forming an ego identity" (p. 289), and that focus on crisis and commitment as components of the identity development process (See Table 4, p.78).

Crisis, according to Marcia, is a "period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives," (elaborating on the Eriksonian definition of crisis as "a turning point, a crucial period of increased vunerability and heightened potential," [1968, p.96]) in order to meet the general developmental need of the adolescent "to make sense out of what has gone before in relation to what he now perceives the world to be" (Erikson, 1960, p. 259). Commitment, to Marcia, indicates a "degree of personal investment" in whatever alternative is chosen by the adolescent. When the adolescent arrives at an achievement point, considered decisions (regarding comfort with one's body or self, career and life goals, and anticipated recognition from others) have been made on the adolescent's own terms. When no commitment is made after looking at a number of alternatives, the adolescent is considered to be in a diffuse status. Marcia also acknowledges that for some adolescents, there may be

either no discernible crisis or commitment during these years, or, for some young people, there may be commitment to a goal or project (foreclosure) without any noticeable struggle to give meaning to the goal or project.

Both Erikson and Marcia acknowledge the importance of the moratorium phase of identity development. Marcia describes moratorium as the point at which the adolescent is in an active struggle to make a commitment and points out the cognitive and affective issues of the adolescent who is in active struggle (preoccupation with "adolescent" issues, trying to resolve discrepancies between parents' wishes and own needs, and the presentation of a "bewildered" appearance due to attempts to resolve "unsolvable" problems).

Erikson (p. 262) describes the moratorium stage as a period of delay in assuming adult roles and discusses the environmental and interpersonal needs of the adolescent during this time (relaxed expectations from others, opportunity to participate in adult work, and time for both introspection and experimentation).

The Marcia concentration points of identity status became a base from which the researcher examined the components of identity development for the high school subjects. Each subject was rated in terms of degree of crisis and level of commitment in each area of identity develop-

ment, using Marcia's criteria to define crisis and commitment, and using the subjects' stated perceptions of themselves in each area as they have been presented throughout this document.

According to Marcia, an adolescent may be a "diffuser" whether or not he/she has experienced a crisis (deciding between meaningful alternatives). The diffuser does not exhibit commitment to a goal or ideology; this may be confusing when one considers that the subject in moratorium status is in the actual, active process of making a decision and is also uncommitted to a goal or an ideology. Table 17 describes and defines the relationship between crisis and commitment and the various identity development statuses.

In addition, it might be noted that when the result of the crisis resolution (commitment) is labeled achievement, it is representative of a strong sense of identity. However, a strong sense of identity can be either positive or negative (becoming that which society, family, etc. does not want one to become). It must also be remembered that the original Marcia study was designed for male college students in order to explore identity development within the context of career plans and ideological commitment. The apparent lack of career and life goals and the relatively unformed ideological perspective of the sample population indicate

Table 17

Relationship between Crisis and Commitment and Identity Development Status

Crisis/Commitment	Achievement Status Struggle over Decision made Direction taken
Crisis/No Commitment	Moratorium Status Active Struggle is in Progress Decisions being made Lack of direction
Crisis/No Commitment	Diffusion Status No decision made No resolution to crisis Lack of direction
No Crisis/Commitment	Foreclosure Status No struggle No decision made Direction provided and followed
No crisis/no commitment	Diffusion Status Nothing to resolve Passive No direction perceived

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that the Marcia "statuses" may be an appropriate measure to use when examining the identity development process of gifted high school underachievers.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed for the developmental status of the subjects in each of the identity development components (comfort with self, career and life goals, recognition from others) and for ideological development, for general developmental status in terms of total identity, and for the nature of the relationship between crisis and commitment in each area of development.

Subjects were considered to be achievers in an area when they indicated to the researcher that they had made a decision that had been clearly thought out and was then acted upon. For one subject this included the decision to leave high school because his grades were so bad he could not possibly graduate; the decision to sit for the General Equivalency Degree and to take the necessary steps to make that happen; and the decision to enter college as a Continuing Education student, reaching his goal of good grades at the post secondary level.

Subjects were given Moratorium status when they indicated that they were in the process of thinking through or acting out an issue in order to come to some resolution regarding the conduct of their lives. For some subjects this included questioning where they fit within their immediate environments and/or within the larger community of humankind.

They were considered to be in foreclosure when they indicated total agreement with the thoughts and actions of their parents, teachers, and others in authority, without giving indication of having worked through the issues on their own terms.

Subjects were considered to be in crisis/diffusion when they indicated that they had made an attempt to come to grips with an issue, but did not come reach a decision that resulted in a direction to follow. For one subject, the difficulties involved in coming to terms with parental expectations after a divorce resulted in an inability to be clear about any part of the subject's academic or social life. During the interview process, Crisis Diffusers also had a tendency to be silent for long periods of time before answering the more difficult questions. They tended to speak in flatter tones than the other subjects and appeared to avoid eye contact with the interviewer from time to time.

Diffusers who had not experienced any crisis (and were therefore uncommitted) were identified, in part, by such phrases as "something will turn up," "I don't know; it'll be OK," or "I've never thought about that before."

The components of identity development and the status concentration points were examined individually for similarities and differences in subject responses, for pos-

sible relationships between the responses and the nature of the crisis and commitment involved, and to assign a general identity status for each subject. The data were also analyzed for the emergence of possible patterns of identity development that might be common to the gifted, underachieving, sample population (See Table 18).

Table 18

Relationship between Identity Statuses and Identity Development Components

	Identity Statuses				
Identity Components	Ach.	Mor.	For.	C.Dif.	Dif.
Self	2	4	0	1	4
Career Goals	0	3	0	3	5
Life Goals	2	3	0	2	4
Recognition from others	3	4	1	1	2
Ideology	2	3	0	2	4

* Ach.= Achievement Mor.= Moratorium For.= Foreclosure
C.Dif.= Crisis/diffusion Dif.= No crisis/diffusion

Status Concentration Points

Achievement Status. Five subjects reached the achiever status in one or more identity components; the total number of achiever responses was nine. One subject was

an achiever in three areas, two subjects achieved in two areas and the remaining two were achievers in one area each. No subject was defined as an achiever in the identity component labeled career.

Moratorium Status. Seventeen responses indicated the subjects had reached a moratorium status; nine subjects accounted for the responses, with one subject in moratorium status in four areas, and two subjects in three components.

Foreclosure Status. Only one subject was identified as being a forecloser, and that in only one area of development.

Crisis Diffusion. Four subjects were in a state of crisis diffusion in one or more areas; one subject was responsible for four of the nine responses. Three of the responses were in the area of career.

Diffusion. Six subjects accounted for the nineteen diffusion identifications. One subject appeared to be diffuse in all five areas of identity development, while two remained uncommitted in four of the identity components. The remaining subjects were diffuse in two areas of development.

Crisis and Commitment

The achievement (nine responses), moratorium (seventeen responses), and crisis diffusion (nine responses) statuses each involved a decision making process. The majority of the identity statuses (thirty five of fifty five possible status states) were found to involve crisis, whether or not it was resolved. Resolution of the crisis results in an achieving identity, represented by commitment to a goal or a plan of action. Both the achievement and foreclosure statuses are concerned with commitment. Only ten of the fifty five responses indicated commitment as a facet of identity. Since the foreclosure status does not involve crisis, commitment as a result of careful thought and consideration of alternatives was a facet of identity for only nine subjects (See Table 19).

Identity Components

The self. Six subjects had reached either the achieving or moratorium status in feeling comfortable with themselves. One subject was a crisis diffuser; the remaining four had not experienced crisis and while generally comfortable with themselves, did not have a clear sense of who they were.

Table 19

Relationship between Crisis and Commitment and Number of Identity Status Responses

	No Crisis	Crisis	
No Commitment	Diffusion 19	Moratorium 17	
		Crisis Diffusion 9	45
Commitment	Foreclosure 1	Achievement 9	10
	20	35	55

Career. No subject was an achiever in regard to career or career goals. Three subjects were in the moratorium process of considering alternatives, three had looked at alternatives and had been unable to make decisions, and five subjects had not experienced crisis nor made a career commitment. None of the subjects was committed to a life career.

Life goals. Two of the subjects appeared to have made some decisions regarding their lives (one was choosing to marry; one had chosen to drop out of school and re-evaluate his educational priorities); three were in a moratorium status; two were crisis diffusers, and four were in a diffuse status. Nine of the eleven subjects had not made a decision regarding life goals.

Recognition of others. Three of the subjects had considered and made commitments regarding relationships with others; four subjects were grappling with the issue of interpersonal relationships; one subject had struggled and not come to resolution, while for two subjects it did not appear to be an issue. One subject was a foreclosser in this status; the family constellation and its problems took precedence over all other issues, including school attendance.

Ideology. Two subjects were achievers in that they had developed a point of view around which to conduct their lives. Three subjects were in the active process of attempting to construct an ideology, while two had attempted and had not found a frame of reference. The remaining four subjects had not yet begun to struggle with an ideology. Seven of the eleven subjects were at a crisis point in this phase of their identity.

General Identity Status

The researcher assigned a general identity status to each of the eleven subjects based on the number of individual statuses which indicated a crisis and a commitment orientation. The data presented two relatively distinct patterns. The first pattern (evident for three subjects) consisted of three or more individual statuses indicating the presence of a crisis that was either resolved or in the process of resolution. Each of these students had perceived their core sense of self to be in an evolving stage. The second pattern (equally as evident for five subjects) was one of crisis or lack of crisis and the presence of a state of diffusion. These students had all described themselves as either undecided about who they were, or they had described themselves in terms of behaviors and characteristics. Two subjects were in a more ambivalent situation, with three status points indicating achievement or moratorium, and two points indicating a diffuse state. Both of these students had indicated during the interview process that they felt they were changing in a positive direction.

It was difficult to classify the remaining subject; she had reached achievement status in two areas and moratorium status in one (fulfilling the criteria for the first pattern). The subject's achieving identity, however, was

negative; her decisions to leave school, to live away from home, and to marry (life goals, recognition from others) were not based on a clearly defined philosophy of life (one of the areas in which she was crisis diffused). She also was crisis diffused in regard to her attitude toward work; she had made decisions regarding work, but was not able to act upon the implications of being a member of the work force without a high school diploma.

Discussion

The data analysis identifies three sets of identity statuses for the high school population; those who are in an active moratorium status and who are achievers in some areas, those who are diffusers (having no direction whether or not they examined their lives), and those who are moving from one group to the the next in what appears to be a positive direction. The subjects all appear to be at concentration points relatively consistent with their perceived notion of their core sense of self.

Nine subjects were in moratorium status in at least one area of identity development, indicating that they are actively working to make sense of their lives. At the same time, nine subjects were in a diffuse status in at least one area of their lives. Seven subjects were both diffusers and achievers at the same time as they dealt with different

phases of their lives. No subject was an achiever in all facets of his/her identity development; only two subjects consistently combined achieving or moratorium statuses in all of the identity component areas; at the same time, only two subjects were consistently in a diffuse or foreclosed status.

Ten of the subjects had experienced (or were experiencing) a crisis in one or more areas of their lives; only one subject was not committed in any phase of his life. The overwhelming majority of responses indicated a lack of direction (commitment) in the subjects' lives regardless of whether they had experienced a crisis; six of the subjects were diffusers without having examined alternatives to the issues facing them.

Not one subject reached achiever status in regard to career plans and goals, although three subjects were actively grappling with the issue. It might be noted that the subject who reached achievement status in three aspects of his life and moratorium status in one was a crisis diffuser in terms of his approach to an occupation. In all, eight of the eleven subjects are "work" diffusers.

It might be concluded that the majority of the high school aged sample population of gifted academic underachievers is actively working on one or more issues related to

identity development and at the same time is either not concerned with, is not ready to, or is unable to come to resolution on other issues.

No subjects have resolved the major issue of future occupation even though the majority of them have worked, and several of them consider work to be important to them. This is consistent with Erikson's view that occupation may be one of the identity development issues that requires a significant moratorium period before it is resolved.

The moratorium period is described as a time during which the adolescent is able to examine alternatives to a current issue, often within the framework of experiences and opportunities not usually found within the parameters of contemporary adolescent life and routine. Torrance describes the moratorium as a time to "wander" and to seek new experiences. The cognitively gifted adolescent, whose perceptions and conceptual abilities are greater than the average adolescent population, may need more time to explore options than others, and may in fact perceive a greater variety of options in the world that require time to be examined.

The cognitively gifted adolescents, capable of a high level of concentration and focus when a subject is of interest to them, may consciously or unconsciously concentrate on one identity issue at a time, or they may work at

different levels of intensity on more than one issue, thus contributing to the picture of an uncommitted, diffuse young person. The variety of options perceived by gifted adolescents may also contribute to the perceived or actual diffusion, presenting an overwhelming amount of input that they are unable to process at one time. In addition, the number and nature of societal and technological changes that have occurred since Erikson posited his notion of the "eight stages of man" may indicate a need for more time in which to develop an identity.

It is unclear at this time whether the identity status findings are specific for this population or whether they are applicable to the general population. The identity development process (at this time in their lives) is not yet complete for these eleven gifted, academically underachieving students. The lack of crisis resolution is most apparent in the portion of their lives that has to deal with choice of a life's career or occupation. Although the majority of the subjects are actively working on one or more of the issues that comprise their identity, they are diffused or uncommitted in other areas.

Summary of Research Question #4

The following steps were taken to answer Research Question #4 (Are there Identity Development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role?) based on an Eriksonian concept of identity development: (a) analysis of individual components of identity development as postulated by Erikson, (b) examination of the re-working of old developmental issues within the framework of current identity development, (c) analysis of the perceived ideological framework within which the gifted underachievers constructed their identity, (d) analysis of the subjects' attitudes toward the educational milieu (one major environment within which identity is developed), and (e) assignment of an identity status to each of the subjects.

The subjects discussed the components of identity development in a broad context of characteristics, behaviors, and feelings. More than half of the subjects indicated that there was a change process involved in the way they perceived themselves;as a result of the change process, they saw themselves in a more positive way. None of the subjects had clear, well planned, long term goals for future education, for career or occupation, or for their lives. The majority of the subjects considered recognition from family

members to be important to them; they were not concerned with recognition from either teachers or employers (even though much of their day is spent in the classroom, and even though work was considered important to some subjects).

Erikson has stated that the identity development process is not concrete or static; that during each phase of development, earlier issues that have been ignored or not fully examined will come to the fore. At the same time, he has said that during each phase of development, earlier issues are reworked within the context of the current phase. A number of the gifted adolescent underachievers appeared to be reworking older developmental issues in one of the two contexts.

Ideology was examined within the context of world challenges and of individual life events that were positive or negative experiences for the subjects. There appeared to be a tenuous developmental connection between the three dimensions included in an ideological perspective; the concrete events that gave meaning to individual lives were those that fostered comfort with the physical self, the events that were dissatisfying were those that involved interpersonal relationships, and the challenges perceived to be important to world survival indicated awareness of a global set of social and environmental constructs within which the subjects might develop a life philosophy.

Data analysis of the environmental milieu revealed that, for the most part, the subjects did not perceive a relationship between the educational process as they experienced it and experiences and/or learning designed to meet the challenges they believe will affect humankind in the future. Most students believed the general purpose of education was to prepare the individual for "life" and they believed their schools were trying, with some success, to do that. They had some difficulty in finding meaningful relationships between some courses of study and immediate life needs; they considered the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the learning process, and the quality of content to be important to their learning. The majority of the subjects said that while school had either a negative impact or no impact on their self concept, they either felt positive about themselves or they felt they were changing in a positive direction. Only two students mentioned underachievement as a factor in self perception.

Comparison of identity status concentration points, the benchmarks of crisis and commitment, and the components of identity development showed that the subjects were either in a moratorium status (working through a crisis with no current commitment) or were diffuse (not working through a

crisis even though there may have been one, but also not committed). None of the subjects had reached achieving status in relationship to career or occupational goals.

Defining an Identity Pattern in which Academic Underachievement Plays a Role

The data analysis, based on interviews with eleven gifted academically underachieving adolescents, using their personal perceptions as the data base, has been concerned with gifted adolescents' perspectives of themselves, their underachievement, their educational purpose and the educational environment in which they are underachieving to determine whether there might be one or more identity development patterns common to some gifted underachieving adolescents in which the academic underachievement phenomenon appears to play an identifiable role.

An identity development pattern that was common to the academically underachieving gifted adolescents who comprised the high school sample population did emerge from the data. The pattern emerged from the conclusions drawn after answering each of the first three research questions as well as conclusions drawn from the answer to this particular question (Research Question #4), and was based on the sub-

jects' perspectives of themselves as developing persons, as gifted underachieving students, and as members of a larger community.

The Pattern

The pattern common to the eleven gifted academically underachieving students is that of an incomplete identity development process at the upper secondary school level, particularly as it concerns decisions to be made about career and lifetime goals.

Identity development is both a process unto itself and a piece of a greater human developmental whole that is constantly evolving. One of Erikson's (1960, p.254) concerns with the general perception of his theory is as he describes it, a "tendency here and there to turn the eight stages into a sort of rosary of achievement...as though each were achieved as a permanent trait." While each of the eight stages of human development, in Erikson's perspective, tends to take place during a certain age span, the completion of each stage task is not always final and will appear again for further completion and refinement at a higher or later stage of development. The adolescent task of identity development (which may be seen as a synthesis of all previous development) may be said to, at

times, involve the reworking or playing out of an earlier stage task within the adolescent framework.

While the identity development process is a synthesis of all previous development, it is, at the same time, a process unto itself which, when successfully completed results in a threefold set of accomplishments (feeling at home with one's body, having career and life goals, and anticipating recognition of others) which are based on a personal ideology. For a number of the sample population, the identity development process was not completed in one or more of the three accomplishment areas, or it was only partially completed in all three areas.

Role of Underachievement

The role played by the underachievement phenomenon is not clear at this point. It might be speculated that academic underachievement assists these gifted adolescents to postpone career decisions and life goal setting until such time as they are ready to make career and life decisions, or that academic underachievement affords them the opportunity to continue to work on the intra and interpersonal issues that are important to them.

There did not appear to be any common thread regarding the specific role academic underachievement played in the lives of the eleven subjects. In some cases, underachieve-

ment appeared to be maladaptive while in others, it appeared to serve a useful purpose for the student. The behaviors leading to underachievement also resulted in subjects perceiving the following consequences:

1. Control of my life
2. Knowledge that I am making my own decisions
3. Choice of areas in which to be responsible
4. Free time to do other things that are more important to me (including working through earlier unresolved crises)
5. Space and time to deal with issues of self, peers, family, and work
6. Recognition of myself as a good person even though my grades are not good
7. Attention (aggravation) from family and school
8. Guilt (bothers me).

The above consequences can be broken down into three categories that correspond to the three components of identity development. Four subjects found underachievement to either give them the opportunity to make independent decisions (which made them feel good about themselves) or, in response to too much cognitive choice, to avoid the decision making process. The subjects who found underachievement to be a means of making independent decisions, in general, were those who stated they were "not bothered" by their underachievement. Those who avoided the process were the subjects who tended to be "bothered" by the low grades.

Six subjects (more than half) indicated that underachievement provided space for them to pursue other

interests before assuming adult status, as well as reflecting time to develop future goals. For two subjects, underachievement appeared to be a result of interaction between the student and significant others from the outside environment, whether or not the subject was consciously aware of it. In this sense, underachievement may be said to involve anticipation (or lack of same) of positive recognition from others.

Comparison of the Sample With other Populations

In order to assist the researcher in clarifying whether the emerging pattern and the role played by academic underachievement were common only to the sample population or whether it might apply to additional adolescent populations, a matrix was designed that allowed the researcher to consider the relevance of each finding to three additional populations.

The underachieving gifted students were compared in all matrix dimensions to achieving gifted students and to both achieving and underachieving average students. The researcher acknowledges that the "armchair" profiles she presents were derived solely on the basis of her non-systematic, accumulated experience with these three populations that includes educational, pediatric nursing, and

consulting experience with children and young people, knowledge of human growth and development and on related literature.

Seven gifted adolescent academic achievers and six "average" achievers of the researcher's acquaintance served as theoretical models for the achieving populations. The researcher's acquaintance with average underachievers has been primarily in situations when the adolescent was having problems with the juvenile justice system, the educational system, or the child welfare system; as a result, her assumptions regarding this population may be skewed.

It must be realized that conclusions drawn from this speculation will need to be re-examined in a more stringent manner, and it must be recognized that a more stringent examination of the additional populations will reveal intragroup differences similar to those found within the gifted underachieving population.

Matrix Analysis

The findings from the each of the research questions fell into three categories: perceptions of self, perceptions of the relationship between school and self, and the consequences of underachievement for the self (See Appendix H). Each perceptual category was placed on the matrix and rated

for similarities and differences across the four populations. There were a number of similarities between the two sets of academic achievers and between the two sets of underachievers in the categories Self and School and the Self. However, when the category labeled Consequences of Underachievement was examined, the average achiever and the gifted underachiever held many of the same perceptions, while there were few similarities noted between the gifted achiever and the average underachiever. The results across all four groups of students will be discussed when there are relationships worthy of comment. Observation of the matrix dimensions shows clear differences between the gifted achiever and the gifted underachiever.

The Self (See Table 20). The gifted academic underachievers perceived themselves to be in a change process; they had a strong drive for autonomy, following their own logic systems that might be in conflict with those of authority. In contrast, the gifted achievers appeared to be in a state of equilibrium and, while they might give the appearance of being independent, the independent actions came as the result of direction from others, and were carried out within a framework that had been set out by those in authority. Both the gifted achievers and gifted underachievers assessed strengths and weaknesses clearly; the

Table 20
Comparison of Gifted and Average
Achievers and Underachievers
Issues of the Self

	Average		Gifted	
Issues	Achiever	Under Achiever	Achiever	Under Achiever
Perception of self as changing	no	no	no	yes
Drive for Autonomy	yes	no	yes	yes
Perception of self as responsible	yes	no	yes	yes
Clear assessment of strengths/weaknesses	yes	no	yes	yes
Willingness to work on weaknesses	yes	no	yes	no
Drive to work out intra and inter personal issues	yes	no	no	yes
Clarity about career goals	yes	no	yes	no
Willingness to work on goals	yes	no	yes	no
Clarity about life goals	yes	no	yes	no
Willingness to work on goals	yes	no	yes	yes
Perception of even developmental progression	yes	no	yes	no
Perception of reworking old developmental issues	no	no	no	yes

difference lies in the fact that the achievers act to improve the weaknesses and enhance the strengths; the underachiever do not act on the perception. Both perceived themselves to be responsible people; the difference between them lies in the perception that the achievers have a drive to be responsible in all areas of their lives, whether it is necessary or not; the underachievers select, in many instances, when to behave responsibly. The gifted achievers did not appear to have a drive to work on intra and interpersonal goals. The gifted underachievers appeared to be oriented to the social aspects of their lives; they thought about and worked on issues relating to relationships.

The gifted academic achievers were clear about both career and life goals and were willing to work on both of them, in contrast to the gifted academic underachievers who lacked clarity on both issues, although they appeared to be trying to articulate general life goals and were willing to work on those particular goals. The gifted achievers had set concrete career and life goals (and may even have a detailed plan of action to reach the goals), usually at the direction of parents or others in authority, and perhaps with the possiblilty of premature identity closure. The gifted underachievers did not have concrete plans in mind.

The differences in characteristics between the gifted achievers and underachievers were striking (See Table 21).

Table 21
Comparison of Characteristics of
Adolescent Gifted and Average
Academic Achievers and Underachievers

	Average		Gifted	
Characteristics	Achiever	Under Achiever	Achiever	Under Achiever
Participates in organized activities	yes	no	yes	no
Is uncommitted	no	yes	no	yes
Is disorganized	no	?	no	yes
Is a Procrastinator	no	?	no	yes
Is well rounded	yes	no	yes	yes
Views the world from a wide-lens perspective	no	no	no	yes

The gifted academic achievers were organized, committed to a course of action (whether other directed or self directed), and completed tasks in a timely manner. The exact opposite held true for the gifted underachiever. The gifted achievers participated in organized group and athletic activities, whether at school or extra-curricular; the gifted underachievers tended to participate in activities which

might involve groups of people but which were neither highly organized nor team oriented. The gifted underachievers participated in activities that can be considered to extend for most of the life span. Both the gifted achiever and gifted underachievers might be said to be well rounded; the difference appeared to be in the pursuit of many interests at the same time by the achievers and the serial pursuit of interests in depth by the underachievers. The gifted achievers appeared to view the world clearly, through a narrow lens (which may have been focused by their parents or others in authority) while the gifted underachievers viewed the world from an umbrella perspective, which may at times be hazy.

The well rounded, clearly focused gifted achievers appeared to be developing their identities at a more even pace than the gifted underachievers; even with the apparent lack of drive to work on intra and interpersonal issues, their career and life focus seemed so clear that the developmental component of anticipated recognition from others is a given. The gifted underachievers were developing at different rates in different aspects of their identity, with particular lack of active development in regard to career and life goals. The gifted achievers also appeared to be in the appropriate developmental place at the appropriate de-

velopmental time. The gifted underachievers gave evidence of continuing to work on earlier developmental issues.

School and the Self. One major difference between the gifted achievers and gifted underachievers was found in the motivation to succeed academically (See Table 22). The

Table 22
Comparison of Gifted And Average
Adolescent Academic Achievers and Underachievers
Issues of School and the Self

	Average		Gifted	
Issues	Achiever	Under Achiever	Achiever	Under Achiever
Motivation to achieve academically	yes	no	yes	no
Distress at poor grades	yes	no	yes	no
Perception that school holds a central place in one's life	yes	no	yes	no
Perception of relationship between school and self concept	no	?	no	yes
Relevance of school to current issues	yes	no	yes	no
Relevance of school to future issues	no	no	yes	no

achievers were highly motivated to achieve, and, unlike the underachievers, were most distressed when they did receive a poor grade. The gifted underachievers were not motivated to achieve, and were distressed at their underachievement only in so far as it impacted those for whom they cared.

School held a central place in the lives of the gifted achievers; they participated in team sports and other extra-curricular activities. School was seldom mentioned by the gifted underachieving population as being important to them. The gifted achievers perceived that what was happening in school was relevant to both current and future issues. High school, for these students, is preparation for college (which to them is preparation for life); high school is relevant to future issues in that, as they perceive it, their future is dependent upon their high school success. The gifted underachievers could see no relevance between high school and current or future issues as they affected their lives.

Consequences of Underachievement. In the eyes of the gifted underachievers, the consequences of underachievement were (with two exceptions) positive (See Table 23). They had free time to do things that were pleasurable to them, and had time to work on major intra and interpersonal issues. They were in control of their lives and were able to

Table 23

Comparison of Gifted and Average
Adolescent Academic Achievers and Underachievers
The Consequences of Underachievement

Consequences	Average Achiever	Average Under Achiever	Gifted Achiever	Gifted Under Achiever
Gives control over life	no	yes	no	yes
Choice to make independent decisions	no	no	no	yes
Choice of where and when to act responsibly	no	?	no	yes
Free time for pleasurable things or projects	no	?	no	yes
Time to deal with major issues of self, family, peers, work	no	?	no	yes
Attention from others	no	yes	*yes	*yes
Guilt	yes	?	yes	*yes

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determine their areas of responsibility through making a choice of whether or not to achieve academically or in some other activity. The gifted achievers only had free time to do pleasurable activities, other than those organized by and for them, if they could budget time. Their lives appeared

to be under the control of others who dictated their activities. They appeared to accept this state of affairs and its concomitant--not having time to deal with major life issues.

The gifted achievers received positive attention from others when they achieved. When their grades dropped or achievement lapsed in other areas, the attention was as negative as that perceived by the gifted underachievers. A number of the underachieving gifted subjects had guilt feelings about their academic underachievement because they were disappointing significant others. The achieving gifted subjects occasionally also had guilt feelings because they perceived that had they tried harder, they would have done better.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is not possible from the data to determine why some gifted students are not underachievers; one can only infer that the achieving gifted students are developing in a manner geared to meet their individual needs. Achieving gifted students may not have entered crisis states, may be achieving due to foreclosure, or may be in a state of transition. It is tempting to speculate that at least some gifted achievers are primarily in a foreclosed status; that their identity is being determined by others which may, in

the long run, result in a postponed identity crisis. Of course, there are probably some achieving gifted students who have struggled and made a decision to achieve.

Comparison of the four populations reveals that the consequences of underachievement are perceived in a generally positive light by the gifted underachievers and are viewed negatively by the gifted and average achievers. This finding gives weight to the contention that academic underachievement plays a role in the identity development of the adolescent gifted underachiever.

The differences between the academically achieving and underachieving gifted populations as examined in the present study indicate that their identity development patterns, while superficially similar, appear to have as a central differentiating factor, the perception by the gifted underachievers that they are in the process of change as people, that this process is self directed, and that those issues involving people and relationships are more important to them than those of occupation.

Average achieving students may achieve due to the lack of career options, alternative concepts, and life perceptions available to the gifted, even though they may experience the same developmental crises as the gifted. Because their world is cognitively more finite than that of

the gifted, their options are more concrete and perhaps more easily managed. Erikson postulates that, for most people, the sense of industry developed during the school years, and necessary for doing things well, "has been not only the beginning but also the limitation of their identity"(p. 127). This observation may hold true for the average achiever.

The researcher's experience with the average underachieving population has been with young people who have an overwhelming number of problems; they are frozen into place by the need to survive and cannot change their patterns. With that caveat, it might still hold true that the difference in cognitive ability may also be the key factor in differentiating between the gifted and average underachiever. Although both sets of underachievers lacked clarity about career and life goals, it could be postulated that the gifted underachiever recognizes a number of options and is not ready to make a decision. The average underachievers may be unable to act on whatever choices there are available due to their life situation.

The preceding data analysis was based on the perceptions of eleven gifted adolescent academic underachievers who were interviewed extensively by the researcher. The three comparison populations consisted of prototypes, drawn

from the researcher's experience with young people. The finding that there is an identity development pattern in which academic underachievement plays a role must be validated by further data triangulation and study replication.

Research Question #5
If So, What are the Patterns, and What is the Role of Underachievement?

Research question #4 identified an identity development pattern that appeared common to the adolescent sample in which academic underachievement might play a role. To examine more fully the possible role of academic underachievement and its relationship to identity development, further data were collected from the college aged (young adult) subjects of the researcher's pilot study and from a cohort of highly successful middle-aged adults who defined themselves as being gifted and underachieving during their adolescent years.

Young Adult Sample

The three students who comprised the high school sample for the pilot study were asked to be part of the current study to determine what, if any, changes had occurred, as they perceived them, in regard to (a) perception of self, (b) perception of life and career goals, (c) perception of self by others, (d) motivation, and (e) the role of underachievement in their lives, both then and at the time of the second interview.

Two students, one male (YAM) and one female (YAF), consented to the follow-up interview. The third student did not respond to the researcher's requests for assistance. It might be noted that the third student was the only one of the three who planned to attend college the autumn following high school graduation; he did so and dropped out at the end of the first year. Since then he has worked as a salesperson, a waiter and/or bartender, and has recently moved out of the state to pursue a musical career.

YAM, aged nineteen, graduated from high school and actively chose, with his mother's consent, to work for a period of time before attending college. He also engaged in an extended walking trip of the British Isles, again with support and encouragement from his mother and his grandparents. He is currently enrolled in a state university; his grades are good.

YAF, aged twenty, dropped out of high school shortly after she became a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist. She attended night school and graduated at the same time as her class. She did not want to attend college then, but received a full scholarship to a state liberal arts college, attended for three weeks and dropped out. She has held a variety of jobs in the past few years, including that of waitress and flagperson. She says that she is now ready to

continue her education, but does not have the money to do so. She wishes there could have been some way to defer the scholarship until she was ready for higher education. She has lived both at home and independently during the past three years.

The three components of identity development include being at home with one's body, setting long term goals, and anticipating recognition from others. The young adults differ from the high school sample in several ways. In general, both of the young adults are at home with their bodies and both are able to acknowledge their perception of the importance to them of being recognized by others. Their goals are somewhat clearer than three years ago, although only one is actively pursuing a college career. They both were able to articulate learnings about the self that occurred during the past three years, which appear significant in terms of life long growth and development. Each was able to describe the family and personal dynamics that played into the underachievement, as they perceived it. In addition, each was able to describe specific personal changes in perception of self that had occurred. Finally, each described the three years in terms synonymous with Erikson and Marcia's conceptions of moratorium, although no question was posed specific to moratorium.

Perception of Self

YAM perceived himself as having "competence, but not confidence." He explained this in terms of academic strengths as reflected in grades, and in his apparent lack of success in developing a meaningful relationship with a person of the opposite sex (becoming tongue-tied or garrulous when making conversation). He indicated that "experience and positive reinforcement" would enhance his confidence. In addition, he described himself as being "intuitive;" and "questioning" his former perception of himself as primarily an "intellectual" being. "Recently," he said, "I feel like I'm searching with some kind of drive; searching for broader deeper meanings."

He described a change in perception of himself that grew out of a "crisis of loneliness" in a remote part of Wales which he said was "a big learning experience, a big learning experience having to fend for myself and deal with myself during an extended period of time. There were some painful periods." He said his major lesson was that he could be alone with himself, could ride out a bad situation (describing it as "riding it out to the end of the tunnel'), and also could leave a situation if it became necessary. He said clearly that the experience was necessary for him, not pleasurable, but memorable.

In addition, he felt that his experience in the moors and mountains of Scotland was "almost a religious experience; vast silences, vast expanses of no one, of the wind through the grass, long open passes and slopes. I just felt as though I could spend the rest of my life up there. There's a feeling of just like that's where [I] belong."

YAF says that she has changed in her perception of self in that she now understands why she did some of the things she did in her high school years, and that "now I understand myself for better or worse; I understand myself a lot better now which makes a difference." She said that she now understood some flaws in her self, and that she has a better "attitude" now than earlier. When asked for clarification, she responded,

> I think better as far as being more positive and more understanding; I have come to be able to step outside of situations a lot of times and it seems that stepping outside of the situation, I can easily understand (almost like a third person can understand) both sides what I am doing and what someone else is doing so it makes it really hard if I'm at odds with somebody and I don't want to understand their side as well as I do but I seem to have developed the ability to do that.

She went on to say that given her home and personal situation in high school that she could not have behaved in any other way, and admits to a certain amount of rebellion as the base of her actions. She acknowledges that she now

recognizes her particular form of rebellion was ineffective, but repeated that she could not have behaved any differently at that time. She goes on to say (speaking of a specific rebellious activity) "at the time I thought it was a useful and productive thing; the fact that it was the last place my mother wanted to see me--and I hate to say it--might have given me a little shove in that direction." She indicated that her opinions on the subject remain the same, but "I have a different attitude; I just think it was not doing anybody that much good, so I don't spend that much time at it, because it's almost defeating itself." She concludes by saying that she was still "being in whatever rebellious state of mind I was in at the time that I went to [college] for a month and decided to leave, which I look back on now as one of the stupidest things I have ever done in my life."

Career and Long Term Goals

Career goals are still unclear for both the young adults, but have more focus than they did in high school.

YAM is a student in good standing at a state university; he speaks about going to graduate school, returning to the British Isles, and becoming a writer, but he says clearly that the overriding concern in his life at the moment is developing a meaningful relationship with a member of the opposite sex. He states that the "idea of doing

something for the rest of your life catches in my throat a little bit, so I guess the closest idea I have right now is writing." He is an English major at the moment. Long term personal goals are a bit more nebulous and appear to have as their over-riding theme, contributing to the betterment of the world and self. He does say that his life goals are "to be willing to accept death when it comes around, assuming that I have time for reflection, and to hopefully live a satisfying and rich life as much as is possible and within that context make the world a better place for my having been there." He goes on to say that he doesn't think he belongs in the "mainstream of American society" and "may end up going in a completely different direction than the rest of the race." He continues in this vein by saying

> "I have the feeling like I'm a ship with sails set but there's no wind; other people are sailing by and they've found the wind. I am here to do something but I have no idea what, and I'm waiting for something to come swooping up and catch the sail."

YAF says that she wants to attend college now, but does not know what she wants to study at this time. "I miss the learning, the atmosphere, being around other people who also want to learn. I would give anything to have a free year right now." She continues to say that she loves learning and has continued to read voraciously since leaving high school. She does not feel that she wants to make a commitment to a

formal educational process until she has a definite goal in mind. She acknowledges that she was not ready to go to college three years ago and that she still does not have a career in mind. "I think that's in part because I'm still just sitting here. I think I need to go out and see what's out there, and what's open to me." She is interested in studying English and Philosophy, but says that there are many people in the kind of job she is now doing who have degrees in those disciplines and who cannot find appropriate work. She also spoke of a desire to travel to the Western mountains, and is saving money to that end. She spoke of her long term desire to join the Peace Corps, but realized that she needed education and training in a specific field to be considered.

When asked about long term personal goals, she was silent for a long time. "That's funny," she finally said. "I never thought I would say, or look forward to, a family; there was a time, and not that long ago when I thought, I don't know why people do this; it's not for me;' but I can see my self somewhere down the road that way with a family. I don't know why."

Recognition from Others

Anticipation of recognition from significant female others was a concern for YAM. He spoke about his stumbling

around when he was with others, and mentioned his tendency to either clam up or talk in a pompous manner to conceal his anxiety. He clams up, he says, because "I never learned the rules of the game; I don't know how to be natural. I'm afraid of saying stupid things, so I don't say anything." He says he is pompous because he intellectualizes "too much." He is anxious for this relationship to "work out" because it is "important to my self concept that I do have some success." He feels that his mother and grandparents understand and accept him; and that their actions regarding his time out from college attendance and their approval of his travel bear that out. He acknowledges his mother's influence on his actions.

YAF perceives that she does not fit the mold her parents would like her to fit and says that she took the college scholarship, even though she did not think she was ready to go to college, in order to please them. She is reflective about her relationship with her parents and would like it to be better; she feels they think that she is unmotivated and lazy, and that they do not perceive the changes she believes have occurred in her self. She perceives that "they hold educational values highly and they don't like to see me doing jobs like working on the road because they see me going nowhere. I don't know where I'm

supposed to be but..." She continues, "it's not OK that they perceive me like that, but I don't know how to change their attitude. I don't know that anything would change their attitude except to go back to school. Which will happen eventually, so I'll just have to wait that long for their attitudes to change."

She acknowledges a change in her relationship with a younger brother, saying that he is beginning to think for himself, to make new relationships based on common thinking rather than on the "in thing or crowd." She says that she is perceiving him in a different light, and that "it made me very happy to find that my brother hasn't locked himself into something. I was very impressed."

Motivation and Underachievement

YAM said that his primary motivation in high school was the need for acceptance by his tight circle of friends, "not necessarily conforming to them but wanting to be accepted by them." Today, "I'm in a position now where I don't have a circle, which is an interesting situation because it means in a lot of ways I have more freedom but am also more isolated. Right now, the key thing for my motivation is making myself better."

> I've developed this image of the ideal which I should be, which is somewhere between Thoreau, Burns and a Zen Buddhist monk, which is a big problem. In two years, I might look back to where I am now and be more accurate of where I am now.

He did not appear to perceive a relationship between motivation and underachievement in high school, saying with a grin, that underachievement "umm, it made things difficult, but yet it was also one of the ways in which I defined myself as a bit of a goof-off." He spoke indirectly to the relationship between motivation and achievement in his perceptions of himself as somewhat underachieving at the present time because he does not have a 4.0 average, which, he says, "If I was working to full potential, I am fairly confident that I would pull a 4." He then discussed the nature of the relationship between learning and grade making, and the value he places on learning. He also stated that establishing a meaningful relationship and establishing a firm philosophical base from which to operate were more important to him than A grades, although he mentioned that scholarships, and graduate school admissions could hinge on the grade point average.

YAF said that in high school she was "motivated by my parents and teachers to maintain the level of work I was doing. I guess when I stopped pushing to do those things , to motivate myself, I didn't have any motivation. Nothing to

replace it with, I guess. I stopped letting them control that [studying for grades] and maybe because I never had to motivate myself, I couldn't." She went on to say that "now I've learned how to motivate myself after being on my own; taking the time to learn that I didn't have before."

She segued into the issue of underachievement by saying that the issues of motivation and underachievement were basically the same. "As long as they were pushing me to achieve, I did. When they didn't, I didn't have the drive to do what I was capable of and could have been doing." Her perceptions about her activities at the present time are that in the sense that she is not in college, she might be said to be underachieving, but "I don't know if I really feel that I am underachieving. I could be doing more, but I don't really feel that that's where I want to be right now. I'm not pushing myself more, but I know that's coming. I feel pretty good about the place I am in now; I know I am going other places. I'm just twenty years old."

Moratorium

Both students spoke directly to the concept of moratorium although direct questions were not asked. YAM stated his high school environment said to him that "I wanted to take time off, and having that time off to travel and to work has done a great deal in developing my perspective. I

have had time to get bored and to stagnate; to drink beer and play games, and having done that I firmly know I don't want to do that for the rest of my life." YAF referred to moratorium when she said that she was not pushing herself but that she knows the time will come when when she will. She was clear in stating her need to explore other places before settling on a career.

Summary

The young adult subjects appeared to have a clearer perspective of their evolving selves than the secondary school subjects. YAF perceived herself as having the ability to take the perspective of a third party, and YAM appeared to be striving for a balance between his perceptions of himself as an intellectual and a new perception of himself as an intuitive being.

The two young adult subjects were similar to the secondary school population in that they were still not sure of their career orientations. They had a somewhat clearer view of the role a college education plays in career development process although, in common with the secondary students, the young adults could not see how it was going to be useful to them. YAM and YAF both articulated general long term personal goals; neither of them are sure how they are going to attain them.

The young adult subjects were able to perceive the role of the family in their developmental process. YAM spoke to his mother's influence on him and to her support and encouragement when he needed a period of time to explore before attending college. YAF spoke to her parent's expectations, her developmental needs, and how the interrelationship between the two played a part in her underachievement. The high school subjects, on the other hand, were unable to perceive the role of family dynamics in their underachievement process.

The young adults perceived a difference in motivation patterns between their secondary years and their current life experience; moving from a pattern of external motivation (peer acceptance, parental expectations) to one of internal motivation (wanting to learn), and they were able to relate motivation and the phenomenon of underachievement.

The young adults expressed the need for a period of time to reflect and to grow before beginning their post-secondary education. The young adult who was given support and encouragement to discover more about himself and the world is now an academically successful college student who is still concerned with his career goals and who is beginning to be concerned with recognition from others outside of a tight circle of friends and family and to examine his own development more closely. The young adult who has postponed

challenge in the face of family opposition is still seeking educational and career goals, although she has developed a strong sense of self and the nature of relationships with others. She is still working, does not have the money needed to return to college, or to explore a larger world than her home town.

Middle-Aged Sample

Six middle-aged, highly successful, gifted adults who defined themselves as being underachievers in secondary school were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of self, motivation, and underachievement. Four men and two women participated in the study. Three of the men are in the business world; one is in the creative and performing arts. Both women are tenured academics, with teaching and administrative responsibilities. Three men and one woman are married, one male is in the process of a divorce, and both women have been divorced. Three of the male subjects attended the same secondary school as the high school sample labeled C. The remaining three subjects attended urban secondary schools--one parochial, and two public.

The adult sample was asked to reflect on their high school, college, and adult lives to determine their perceptions of their self concept then and now, of the role under-

achievement played in their lives, the motivating factors in their lives, and the relevance of their high school educations to their current careers.

The data were divided into three sections: the high school years, the transition years, and the middle years. Within each section a number of factors evolved as important in the perceptions of the six subjects. The high school years includes feelings about high school, self concept, the underachievement phenomenon, a rationale for the underachievement, motivation, and career plans. The role played by the family and community in the underachievement phenomenon was discussed by several subjects.

Transition years were defined as the years between high school graduation and the time at which the subjects changed the pattern of underachievement to one of achievement. The role of significant others was discussed in depth by some subjects. The adult years focus on the present; they include current perceptions self concept, motivation, and life satisfaction.

High School Years

Feelings About High School

All six of the subjects said that high school was a negative experience for them. Four subjects described the years in terms of the words hate and/or unhappiness ("I

hated high school--I felt unhappy;" "I was unhappy and confused"). Two found it to be a blur ("My high school years are sort of a blur and the most I can tell you is I wanted to get them over with").

Self Concept

Four of the subjects said that their self concept in high school was either negative or non-existent. "I didn't have a concept of self. I didn't know what concept of self was. I didn't know what the hell I was trying to do." Two appeared somewhat neutral in that they described themselves as "popular" or as "doing what I wanted."

Five of the subjects mentioned their body image at some time during the interview, although no specific questions were asked regarding body image. The general perception was one of ugliness, awkwardness, and/or ungainliness. One subject said that she ceased athletic activities after her teacher called her a "cow." All of the males mentioned athletics in one way or another. Three did participate actively in sports, although one described himself as a "failed athlete," while the fourth managed a team. It might be noted that the three males who attended the same high school (although at different times) all talked with grins about their experiences in the local pool hall and the people with whom they "hung around." The male who de-

scribed himself as a failed athlete also said, "I played pool almost every day for four years and still was not any good." All subjects mentioned the importance of their social experiences during their high school years, ("it was important for me to be liked," "I wanted to have fun").

Perceptions of Others

Four of the subjects had been labeled by teachers or guidance personnel as being incapable of academic success. "You don't have the brains to be among the elite of us," was one comment, while another subject said that his freshman English teacher told him that he was illiterate. A third subject said that the guidance director called her parents and told them that their daughter would probably make a fine clerk in a store, but that she did not have the ability to go on to higher education.

Career Plans

Five of the six subjects said they had no career plans in mind when they finished secondary school. Four of the six "assumed" they would go to college due to family expectations ("I thought that was the social thing to do"). One assumed he would "work" while another said "I just knew what I didn't want to do."

Relationship of High School to Current Career

All six subjects used the word irrelevant to describe the relationship between high school and their current career. One stated that "high school is a baby sitting service for teen-agers," and went on to say that he "didn't learn much; got out and messed around, and started to read. And then I started to learn things."

However the two female subjects said that high school did have a non-academic impact on their current career because "I hated school and thought there could be a better way to teach; that I could treat kids in a nicer way than I had been treated, and I felt that way all through school." The second woman described the relevance of high school in terms of gaining a better understanding of self and students as well as an understanding of how to teach and how not to teach.

Underachievement

The six subjects acknowledged the phenomenon of underachievement in their high school lives and provided a retrospective rationale for the same. Five stated that they did not choose to underachieve; they "just didn't do the work." For two subjects, social class mitigated against achievement as a value, and for the two female subjects there was a perceived difference in the school's teaching style and

their learning styles. At the time however, one of the females said, "School and I just couldn't make it." One male subject did choose to underachieve in English because "I was maturing as a man, and I thought this was a feminine activity, and I didn't want to do that."

While acknowledging his difficulties, one subject said that "I didn't underachieve; I got around the problem by transferring out of college level courses which I couldn't do in English and languages into the general courses." This subject perceived his major problems to be in writing and language arts skill development and said that he noticed it himself as early as the third grade.

Motivation

Motivation for the six subjects in high school was not based on their perceived need for academic excellence. Social motivation was important for four subjects and included such things as need to be liked by others, sports, "girls," and to have fun. The two female subjects said they were motivated by curiosity, which was not related to school. One subject said that she was also motivated by the fact that, for her, education was a means to an end, a route to security.

When asked what they would do differently if they had their high school years to re-live, five subjects said

clearly that there was no way they could have behaved any differently during their high school years, given the situations. The subject with language arts problems said that if the problem had been picked up earlier, perhaps he could have done things differently, but he doubted it. One subject did say wistfully, "I wish I would not have been so lonely," while another said with a laugh that he would have paid more attention to the girls.

Role of the Family

The middle aged sample reflected on the role of the family (and, for two, the greater community) during their high school years. All six subjects mentioned families. Two subjects discussed the class and cultural values of their families, the school community and the town at that time. They perceived that the "working class" did not support the values of the academic world, and they felt the school system almost automatically tracked the "lower class" kids into the non-college preparatory classes. A third subject said that her parents were highly supportive of her, while a fourth merely stated that his family assumed he would go to college. Two subjects had support from the opposite sex parent; one of them felt he had no support from the same sex parent and the other said that while her mother perceived her as a "dummy," she was supportive of her as a

person. (This parent allowed her daughter to drop out of high school at age 16 and run her own sewing business until she chose to return to school).

The Post-Secondary Years

Transition from Underachievement

The subjects were asked when they noticed a change from their underachieving patterns to achievement. One subject described herself as an underachiever during her first two high school years, and said that she began achieving in her junior year because she learned how to conform, and because she passed a math class after promising the teacher she would never take a math class again. She then excelled in the humanities. Two subjects began to achieve when they entered the "real" world after college. The remaining three said they began to change somewhere between the ages of 21 and 23. One subject said he could pinpoint the day and the minute when he realized the need to change; he thinks that a female may have triggered the realization, but is unsure.

The second said that about the age of 21 he began to read. Friends told him that he was smart, loaned him their books and:

> I read for a whole year; read about two books a week. I read so much that when I started college I had the highest average in the freshman class. I went from being a high school failure to being a phenomenal success.

The third subject had dropped out of a Junior college, attempted to box professionally, and then held a succession of jobs with little promise of life satisfaction. He said that "I guess I was 21 or 20 when I decided precisely. I didn't ever want to be in a place where I couldn't use the energy and motivation I knew I had."

Three male and two female subjects entered college directly after graduation; two males took longer than the customary four years to graduate. One male dropped out of school and said with some pride, "I don't have an MBA; I don't even have a BA." The two female adults acquired advanced terminal degrees.

Role of the Armed Forces

Three of the four males spent time either in the armed forces or serving with the Army Reserve. One subject described his military service (post college) by saying, "it showed me how scared I was to be alone; all those fears as a child were coming out. But, when I look back...I enjoyed it. When it's[sic] over, you feel good about it. It was a growing process."

The second male, who entered the service prior to college entrance (and who wanted to attend college but was told he was not intelligent enough) said, "I do have very happy memories. I got away from home, which every kid wants to do; I was on my own as as far as I was concerned. I think peacetime army is a great spot for a kid."

Role of Significant Others

Three males mentioned people who had been helpful to them, during their high school and/or early adult years. It is interesting to note that a priest was a significant person in the lives of three of the males. In addition, one male and both females mentioned the college professors who gave them encouragement, support, and guidance. Only one subject did not mention a specific mentor, but he did speak of the role his parents and their values played in shaping his life, primarily through example and implicit assumptions regarding his life course. In each instance the subjects felt that the intervention had directed them away from a negative life course although they may not have acted on the advice given to them at the time it was given.

Self Concept

Five of the six subjects indicated that their self concept underwent a change for the positive during this period in their lives. "I began to take myself more

seriously," "I learned I was as good as the other hot shots, and so having learned, I had the confidence; I had the notion I was good." The sixth subject inferred feeling good about himself when he said, "My college years were the happiest of my life." Each of the mentioned changes appeared to coincide with a realization on the part of the subject that he/she had a specific personal trait or skill that was positive ("I had the gift to make people smile") or ("I couldn't be top dog, but I could be second and do well," "my peers thought of me as a leader"). In addition, professors, house mothers, and others within the academic environment provided opportunities for the abilities to become evident. One subject cited the fact that her college was smaller than her high school graduating class; she said it gave her an opportunity to develop skills and abilities. Another mentioned the structure imposed on him in his Jesuit College as fostering his ability to perceive himself in a realistic, positive way. The subject who is in the field of creative and performing arts said that he became more confident and positive about himself when a world-famous artist accepted him into his graduate class.

The Adult Years

Self Concept

Five of the subjects described themselves as having a positive self concept at the present time. The sixth subject, a reticent person, described himself as he thought others perceived him, and wondered if he really lived up to their perception. He reflected a bit and then said "I guess they must see something in me or they wouldn't ask me to do that" (referring to an important, personal undertaking).

Motivation

When asked what the motivating factors were in their lives today, three general sets of responses evolved.

Two subjects (one male and one female) said they were motivated by a) the need for security, and/or b) the need to win, and c) the fear of failure. One said clearly, "Fear of losing has driven me and the desire to stick it in one's ear" and "I've been driven by wanting to win. I've got to win." The other said clearly, "I do not like to lose." In addition, this subject referred to an episode in her younger life that had direct influence on her motivation then and now. In order to reach a major city, the family traveled through a barrio. "I used to think that if I could get an education that it would be the only guarantee that I would

never live in a place like that. There was poverty on my mother's side and I didn't' want to be that way." As an adult, she closed a successful business due to potential litigation problems which might impact her future security. She also talked about the "experience of mountains," saying that the attempt to reach the top of the mountain, whether physically, cognitively, or affectively is a major conscious motivating force for her.

Two subjects were motivated by a need to achieve for personal reasons (to do it right, to be the best [in his career]), and/or for approval from significant others. "I still need to be liked," said one, although he indicated that he has found a comfortable level in which to live with this need, or to please a long dead relative "who was the only adult who talked rationally to me." One of these subjects is also motivated by the need to act in a responsible manner and to strike a balance between the emotional, career and spiritual needs in his personal life.

The remaining two subjects are motivated by the need to leave things better than when they began, to make things grow. They talked about the relationship between this particular motivation and their careers; it is explicit in the manner in which they deal with subordinates and peers; it is implicit when they speak of family. It is interesting to note that both of these subjects had serious learning prob-

lems during their school careers, and both felt that things could have been different only if the problems had been identified and acted on in the early years.

Life Satisfaction

All six indicated that they were pleased with their lives at this point. They like what they are doing now and would not change their path. "I am content. I like what I am doing." "I cannot think of doing anything else other than doing what I am doing today, being in the business world," said one, with the caveat that he wished he had explored the larger world before entering the family business. The one subject whose career is in the creative and performing arts did mention that it might be interesting to pursue a new career in a different facet of the arts, just because it might be fun. Each subject did express the desire to change some aspect of their interpersonal lives to some degree, but the desire was stated in positive terms, such as wanting to be a better parent.

The men have not changed careers since their 20's, and have steadily advanced in their particular field. Three are still working in the same city in which they were raised. Three of them find their work their main hobby. Two men continue to play volleyball in their spare time, while another swims.

The two women on the other hand, while remaining in the "education field," have experimented with a wide variety of roles within that field and have explored career options outside academia (international relations, state government, photography, cooking). Both women stated that now, in their mid-life they find the bits and pieces of their career(s) coming together into a meaningful whole. "It makes sense now." The wide variety of interests they pursued as career paths remain their avocations today.

Discussion

Several issues arose during the course of the interview that merit discussion at this time. They include the role of the environment, the nature of the transition years, and the possibility of gender difference in evolving developmental patterns.

Role of the Environment

When the middle-aged sample reflected upon their high school and transition years, the greater environment appeared to play a prominent explicit and implicit role in their perceptions of the underachievement phenomenon. All the subjects mentioned family relationships and values that impacted their achievement in a positive or negative manner during the high school years. Four of the subjects found

peer values to be important to their achievement, and for one subject, a partial factor in the decision to attend college was the fact that his friends were all joining the army and did not invite him to join with them. The school environment was perceived by two subjects to be a negative factor in their motivation to achieve due to its structure along economic class lines. In addition, one student found the transition from a small rural elementary school to a huge overcrowded city secondary school contributed to her feelings of confusion and inability to learn. During the transition years, the choice of college appeared to be a factor in reversing the pattern of underachievement for three subjects. One attended a college smaller than her high school graduating class; one dropped out of a college that required proficiency in written English (transferring to one which did not), and one attended a strict Jesuit institution. For those two subjects who might have been found to be "learning disabled," neither the diagnostic tools or the appropriate interventions were available to their secondary schools. Two subjects mentioned the "pull" of their local community. Three of the subjects are still in their hometown. The greater national community provided some subjects with time to reflect without the need to choose career or direction due to the national availability of military service.

Role of the Transition Years

The transition years, those between 18 and 25, appeared to provide five of the subjects with a time and space in which to develop and to make decisions regarding careers and long-term life goals. The subjects stated that these years gave them time to know what they did and did not want to do; and to discover what meaningful skills they possessed. Mentors appeared to enter the subjects' lives at this point, as spiritual advisors, college professors, or friends with good advice. The appropriate choice of environment, whether institution of higher learning, a non-demanding work place, or the armed forces appeared to facilitate the subjects' ability to make career and life decisions.

Possible Gender Difference

A potential gender difference in developmental evolution emerged from the data as the middle-aged sample reconstructed their live patterns, primarily in the arena of career and life goals.

The female sample appeared to have a general picture of a life goal by the time they finished high school. They knew "there had to be a better way to teach" and that education was a means to a secure future. Both women attended college immediately following high school and entered their

chosen field. However, they followed many diverse paths during their adult lives (politics, international relations, photography etc.), always returning to the education field at different places within the education field (elementary school, college, graduate school) at different times. Their goal, no matter what field of endeavor they were in, continued to be the improvement of education for students or the development of a secure base.

The men did not have a world view when they finished high school. Two knew they did not want to remain in their current environment, but had no idea as to how they were going to change that. The males appeared to find their niche toward the end of their transition years, when they discovered a personality trait or a skill that was marketable and which they "were good at." One marketed his business abilities, one his focused aggression (his ability to single-mindedly pursue a goal), one his ability to make people smile, one his ability to paint. Three chose their career; the fourth entered the family business, tacitly acknowledging his family's choice of career for him. All males have remained in their first major career choice and have steadily progressed within that career. All express contentment with their lives and careers.

Summary

The six middle-aged subjects reflected on the changes they have noticed in their self concept, life and career achievements, and motivational patterns for a period of time from their teen years to the present.

The concept of self was negative during the high school years, began to change during the early adult years and at the present time, is generally positive and is reflected in the satisfaction with which the subjects view themselves and their lives. The same pattern appeared to hold true for the phenomenon of academic underachievement which peaked during the high school years, underwent a transition during early adulthood, and is now a pattern of career and personal achievement. Motivation during the high school years was directed primarily by the social needs of the subjects, which included athletic activities and the need to be one of a group. Motivational patterns began to change during the early adult years, primarily as a result of time spent in the armed forces, in college, or in a variety of work activities which gave little satisfaction. Motivational patterns today for the subjects appear to be based on clearly articulated security, intrapersonal, relationship, or future oriented needs with which the subjects state they feel comfortable.

Career paths and life goals were non-existent or nebulous during the high school years. They began to crystallize during the transition years, with the men focusing on a career path by their mid twenties. The female subjects had a general goal, but feel that their middle years have been the period of time during which their life picture has become meaningful.

Five of the subjects completed college; two received advanced degrees. The males have progressed steadily in their chosen careers; the females have pursued a variety of activities within and without their chosen career. The males were certain of life direction by their mid-twenties; the females appear certain at the present time.

Conclusion

Examination of the data revealed a general pattern of development as perceived in retrospect by the adult sample. Academic underachievement was not important during their high school years; they were motivated by social, biological and interpersonal concerns. In general, they did not choose to underachieve; they just "did not do the work." The choice to go to college, work, or enter the armed forces after high school graduation appeared to be an issue decided by general family values and/or expectations. The subjects

perceived that during this time, they had no specific career or life goals to use a guideposts.

With one exception, the adults appeared to "evolve" out of the underachievement phenomenon during the transition years (roughly 18-25). This evolution appeared to occur first on a personal level due to an increased sense of self concept, and then to occur on the academic and/or work level as the subjects perceived they had career plans and life goals. In the majority of cases, another person was involved in facilitating the change in perception of self or in directing subject skills and energies to a life goal. This process of career and life goal development appeared to take place in an environment that allowed the subjects to reflect upon what they did and did not want to do with their lives.

All adult subjects stated that they could not have done things any differently during their high school years, given their situation at that time, which focused on immediate biological and affective needs rather than academic, long-term goals and objectives.

From this retrospective view of six gifted successful middle-aged adults who were academic underachievers in high school, it might be inferred that academic underachievement in the gifted high school student is an overt manifestation of the need to focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal

development before one makes decisions regarding career and life-style, and that long term career decisions evolve from a period of trial and reflection during the transition years.

Comparison of Sample Populations

In examining the three populations within the context of identity development and underachievement, several perceptual similarities and differences stand out: feelings about the high school experience, the underachievement phenomenon and individual motivation, perceptions about self and others, and career and life choices.

The High School Experience

The high school population did not say they have found their high school years to be unhappy although they did say that the curriculum was irrelevant to what they perceived to be the major issues of the day, and in some cases irrelevant to "real life." The middle-aged population, on the other hand, all remembered their high school years as a negative experience. They did agree with the high school sample in that they felt their high school academic education was irrelevant to their current career.

Underachievement

All subjects acknowledged that they were academic underachievers; the majority of the them believed that they did not choose to underachieve. None of the three sample populations described themselves as being motivated by the need to strive for academic excellence.

Both the young adult and middle aged populations perceived a shift in the underachievement pattern during the early twenties, or transition years. The middle aged sample reflected upon the age at which they found perceived the shift to occur; it occurred, they said, when they found a personal or career direction; this discovery appeared to be based on an increased sense of self and the realization that they possessed skills and abilities, that together empowered them to focus on a personal or career direction. The age of discovery ranged from 21-25 and occurred either in the form of an extended period or as a specific moment when an insight jelled that tended to follow a period during which they were able to experience a variety of work and life options. The young adult sample indicated that they have found a personal direction for their lives, that they are more sure of themselves, even though they are still developing their concept of self. They are still not sure of their career direction, but feel confident that one will appear. The age of the young adult sample is 20; they are

still experiencing a variety of work and life options. It would appear that the young adult sample is in the beginning phase of the career decision-making process which was completed by the adult sample at around age 25. It would also appear that the high school sample has not yet entered fully into this process.

The pattern of evolution out of the underachievement phenomenon as described by the middle-aged sample appeared to be playing out with the young adult sample: both subjects had a strong sense of self while contending that they were still learning about themselves. The subject who is currently a college student has a vague idea as to career (English and writing) but is not sure how that connects to a larger life picture of leaving the world a better place. The female subject is clear in wanting to continue her education, but does not yet have a sense of how a degree in philosophy can be translated into a secure future. Both of the young adult subjects believe that they are no longer underachieving in either a personal or an academic sense although one is not "getting straight A's" and the other is not in school.

Motivation

The need for academic achievement did not appear to be a motivating factor for any of the three sample populations.

Both the young adults and middle-aged sample perceived motivation during their high school years to be dictated primarily by peers and social needs. The middle-aged sample (upon reflection) was also aware of the biological foundation of their social drives. The young male adult is aware at this point in his life of a biological base underlying his social drives. The high school sample perceived that external factors (other people or curiosity regarding something) motivated them when they did achieve. They also perceived that teacher actions or school-related happenings were primary factors in lack of motivation to achieve.

The young adults perceived their present motivation to be internally directed, regardless of the foundations. The middle-aged sample was clear in noting the factors that motivated them, whether internally or externally directed; they were able to describe the path by which they reached their understanding of their motivational patterns.

Perceptions of Self

The high school and middle-aged sample both described themselves as having a social orientation, with the middle-aged sample clearly stating that girls and sports were more important to them than academics. While the high school sample did not say that overtly, the data indicated that their areas of competency and interest were in life-long

sports and social activities. This orientation is consistent with the literature's perspective on the gifted underachiever.

In contrast to the high school respondents, the middle-aged respondents described themselves primarily as having a negative self concept during their high school years; nine of the eleven high school subjects appeared to have either a positive self concept or a picture of the self that was evolving into a positive mode. The young adults did not reflect upon their self concept as such during their high school years; they reported experiencing positive feelings about self, both then and now. They were more articulate about the components of their self concept than were the high school subjects.

Neither the high school sample nor the young adult sample referred to their body image, more often addressing their competencies in cognitive or social spheres. The middle-aged sample, on the other hand spoke freely of their perceived physical appearance during their adolescence, and their negative feelings about their appearance.

Career and Life Goals

All three sample populations were clear in stating that they did not have career goals for themselves at the end of their secondary years, although the two female adults did

have a general life goal. All of the high school sample said that college education was in their future plans "sometime," consistent with the the belief of the young adult who is not yet in college. The majority of the middle-aged sample stated that at the time of high school graduation, they did plan to attend college. Attending college for all three samples tended to reflect a feeling on the subjects' part that post secondary education (or lack thereof) was just one step toward an indefinable future.

As discussed in the previous section on Underachievement, the development of career and life goals is occurring for the young adult sample at the present time, and was perceived by the middle-aged sample to have occurred during the transition years. The development of career and life goals appears to happen concurrently with the perceived change in the underachievement pattern. It would appear, from the comparison of the underachievement patterns of the young adult and middle-aged samples, that a possible relationship exists between the underachievement phenomenon and the lack of career and life goals common to all three sample populations during their high school years.

Role of Others

The role of others in the lives of the subjects and its possible impact on their academic underachievement was per-

ceived clearly by the middle-aged sample. This sample was able to reflect back and examine the role of the family and its possible impact on their academic underachievement. Family interaction, family culture, socioeconomic status, and family values were all discussed. The socioeconomic status of the family was felt by some middle-aged subjects as contributing toward negative perceptions of them, as well as unfavorable class placement within the education community. The young adults were able to discuss the relationship between themselves and their families as a possible contributory factor in both their underachievement and their subsequent change to an achieving pattern, but did not mention a socioeconomic factor. The high school subjects (with one exception), on the other hand, were unable to perceive any relationship between their family situation and their academic underachievement.

Discussion

Research Question #4 identified an identity development pattern that might be common to some gifted underachieving adolescents, but did not clearly identify possible roles played by academic underachievement within the identity development process.

Erikson has claimed that the task of the adolescent is to develop one's identity; to be at home with one's body, to

have career and long-term goals defined, and to anticipate positive recognition from others at some time in one's life. The data have shown that the gifted adolescent academic underachievers in this study perceive themselves to have an evolving, positive sense of self, although they make limited reference to their body image. They perceive their families, in general, in a positive light and are unable to see the role their family might play in the underachievement phenomenon. The adolescent sample however, does not have plans for either a career, a job, or a specific plan for conducting their lives during the next few years. The entire sample acknowledges that college attendance is in their plans at some time, but they are not definite about the institution they want to attend or the course of studies they want to pursue.

The young adult sample also perceived themselves in a positive light; they were able to articulate the attributes of self that were important to them and that they have seen emerge. One young adult discussed interpersonal relationships as having an impact on his self concept; he found that successful relationships were important to his sense of self. This sample was able to reflect on the role the family and/or peers played during the time they felt they were underachieving. They recognized the interrelationship between themselves and their families, and accepted respon-

sibility for their underachievement. The young adult sample, aged 20, is somewhat more certain of long term life goals than the adolescent sample. They are still attempting to define career goals. They appear to be cognizant of either personality traits or skills and abilities that may stand them in good stead when they do decide upon a career, but have not yet applied the traits or skills to a specific career. Although they have not completed post-secondary education, nor found a career direction, the young adult sample does not perceive itself as underachieving at this time. They have spent their post-secondary years working at a variety of routine jobs; one has traveled extensively. They said they have done a great deal of thinking during the past three or four years. They appear content to be where they are. They also stated clearly that they could not have lived their high school lives any other way.

The middle-aged sample reflected on their lives and stated clearly that their self concept during their high school lives, was not positive, and that high school was a negative experience for them. They also stated clearly that their high school academic curriculum was irrelevant to their current career. They agreed with the young adult sample by saying that they could not have lived their high school lives any other way. Again in agreement with the

high school and young adult samples, the middle-aged population did not have career or life goals in place when they finished secondary school. This population did perceive that there was a decided relationship between family dynamics and their underachievement and extended the concept of interaction to the larger school, community, and national environment.

The transition years appeared critical to the development of the middle-aged sample. It was during these years (defined by the subjects as between ages 21 and 25) that the pattern of underachievement changed to one of beginning success and achievement. The patterns changed for a number of reasons; the subjects found positive reinforcement from people within their environment, people whom they described as mentors; the subjects discovered characteristics within themselves that they felt were positive; they discovered skills and abilities which, when combined with their personal characteristics, empowered them to be successful, either in business or in their educational environment. Some subjects had a period of time during which they tried out a number of roles, working at a variety of non-demanding jobs or joining the armed forces.

From the transition years to the present, the male middle-aged population has steadily become more successful it its chosen fields; they have not deviated from their

first choice of career. The female population, while remaining under the broad umbrella of a general field of endeavor, explored a variety of career options. The women are clear in stating that now, in their middle age, the pieces of their careers have become a synergistic whole.

While Erikson speaks generally of the adolescent years as the years in which the young person develops the three components of his/her identity, Kegan (1982) postulates that the need to develop affiliations with others may actually occur earlier than the years commonly associated with the process of identity development. It might also be postulated that the setting of life goals and determining a life career, in modern Western United States society, is a task better deferred to the years of young adulthood, and that the secondary school years are best suited for developing a positive sense of self.

Erikson also points out that his notion of developmental stages is not compartmentalized, and in fact, each stage of development may be re worked (re-appropriated, according to Kegan) and reincorporated into a more integrated stage. The high school population appeared to be re-working a variety of developmental issues. This was not apparent with the young adult sample, but was evidenced in the motivational patterns of the middle-aged sample. The need for security, the need to win, the need to be thought

responsible, the need for affection, the need to make things grow; each of these needs might be said to represent one or more levels of developmental need now being met by the adult subject through the mechanism of achievement and success rather than through underachievement.

Erikson describes the concept of Moratorium as critical to the development of an individual's identity. Moratorium is defined as a period of time during which the individual is able to attempt a number of things, to choose and discard, to experiment until a choice can be made in regard to ones future life. The transition years, as perceived and experienced by the middle aged and young adult populations of this study, appear to represent a moratorium stage.

The Role of Underachievement

Academic underachievement then, for these gifted persons, becomes an overt manifestation of the underachieving adolescents' needs to focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal development rather than on development of the cognitive skills they do not perceive as relevant to their lives prior to making major decisions regarding career and life goals. It might also be inferred that the transition years in United States society might be considered age-appropriate for such critical decision making rather than the high school years.

For the secondary school underachieving gifted student, who is developmentally unable to make major career and life decisions prior to graduation, a secondary, although immediate role of academic underachievement, may be as a means by which the student gains some necessary moratorium time in which to begin to work on the task. At the same time, for those secondary students who are re-working earlier developmental issues, academic underachievement may be seen as one process by which those issues are being resolved. These roles appear consistent with the incompleted identity development pattern examined in the previous section.

Conclusion

Reframing the Concept of Identity Development

The Eriksonian concept of identity development is that of a process which takes place primarily during the adolescent years and during which the adolescent discovers a sense of self, a career and life goal, and anticipates the recognition of others in his/her life. The current study indicates that for some gifted adolescents who are underachieving academically within the secondary school setting, the task of identity development is a lengthier process than Erikson envisioned, extending through the transition years. The task of determining career and life goals is not one

that can be readily accomplished during the adolescent years. The primary task of the gifted underachieving adolescent may be perceived as that of developing a social identity, concerned with becoming at home with one's self and anticipating recognition from others. Erikson himself has said that his conception of developmental stages is not meant to be construed as being appropriate at only one age, but rather that each of the stages is re-worked during each phase of one's life; and that the satisfaction one finds with one's life is dependent on the degree of success with which one emerges from each successive developmental crisis.

With the above statements in mind, it would appear appropriate to speculate that the adolescents of this sample are actively engaged in becoming at home with their bodies (and selves) and are developing social relationships with others, and that perhaps they are unable at this time to engage in the active process of determining life and career goals. This research finding is consistent with Kegan's (1982) notion that the task of social relationship development is a function of adolescence and that the development of career and life goals is more appropriately a task of young adulthood.

Recognition of Moratorium

Concomitant with a rethinking of the components of identity development is a recognition of the importance of the moratorium phase in the development of career and life goals. The active period of moratorium for the young adult underachieving sample began after the high school years, and was also perceived by the middle-aged, formerly underachieving sample as taking place during the young adult years. The Eriksonian concept of moratorium, expressed in general phenomenal terms, appears to be a more passive process for the underachieving high school subjects. Their moratorium state was visible in the phenomenon of their academic underachievement, through which they demonstrated their developmental unreadiness to commit to career and lifetime goals.

Underachievement, Moratorium, and Identity Development

The researcher's findings indicate that the secondary school gifted adolescent may use academic underachievement as a passive mechanism prior to reaching the active young adult moratorium state. Moratorium, representing the active struggle proposed by Marcia, is in evidence during the transition, young adult years (18-25), with resolution of the career and life goal conflict apparent when the underachievement pattern is transformed into one of achievement

and success. Certainly, the young adult sample was actively struggling to construct their identities, but had not yet completed the task. The middle-aged sample evoked clear memories of their transition years, along with the life decisions they made.

Reframing the nature of identity development, paying increased attention to the concept of (and need for) a moratorium state, and reflecting on an extended concept of identity development also reframes the concept and phenomenon known as academic underachievement. When academic underachievement is perceived as a response to developmental patterns that are out of the control of the underachieving student, it then becomes an appropriate mechanism by which gifted adolescents can grow to full functioning adulthood at their own pace, rather than at a pace determined by an arbitrary family, educational, or societal norm.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Implications of the Study

Research Questions #4 and #5 focused attention upon the perceptions of high school students for evidence of possible identity development patterns common to some gifted adolescents in which academic underachievement appeared to play an identifiable role. The study was conceptualized within a set of parameters that included the nature of the gifted child and the underachieving gifted child, the nature of the adolescent, the process of identity development (commonly associated with adolescence in western culture), and the role of the adolescent in United States society. The researcher hypothesized that findings from the study might reframe the way in which parents, educators, and others who are responsible for the nurturing and education of society's children respond to the phenomenon of academic underachievement in the gifted adolescent.

The information obtained from the high school sample was compared to information elicited from a small, gifted, underachieving young adult sample and from six successful middle-aged adults who were gifted and underachieving during their high school years. Examination of the core data revealed an identity development pattern that tended to

remain consistent across the three sample populations. The pattern was one of an incomplete identity development process at the secondary school level.

The data implied that there was a need for a period of reflection and experience before making life and career decisions, and that academic underachievement was a mechanism by which some gifted adolescents initiated a process of reflection and experience in regard to social and personal issues before dealing actively with issues of career and life goals. In view of the researcher's findings, further study needs to be conducted regarding the nature of the Eriksonian concept of identity development as it applies to the gifted, academically underachieving adolescent and to determine whether the findings hold true for a larger adolescent population.

Particular issues to be examined by future researchers include a) the period of time needed by the individual to complete the task of identity development, b) the possible sequential patterns of identity development components for various groups of adolescents, and c) the role played by the moratorium stage in the life of the adolescent and the young adult. In addition, further examination of the relationship between gifted academic underachievement and both the moratorium state and identity development is desirable. It might also be appropriate to study the effect that the rapid

social and technological changes that have occurred in western society in the past thirty years have had on the Eriksonian concept of human development--especially its timing.

As Crain (1985) points out, "interesting empirical research on his [Erikson's] theory has been slow to develop" (p.180); he explained the lack in terms of Erikson's "general vagueness" and lack of clarity regarding conceptual issues. Shaffer (1985) concurs with Crain when he indicates that Erikson primarily provides a" descriptive overview" of development on which others may build. Erikson himself has said, "I came to psychology from art, which may explain, if not justify, the fact that the reader will find me painting contexts and backgrounds where he would rather have me point to facts and concepts" (1950, p.17; in Crain, 1985, p. 180).

Limitations of the Study

Conclusions of the study are limited by the size and selection of the sample. Confirming the patterns of identity development common to some gifted underachievers and further defining and examining the role of academic underachievement within these patterns are studies that should be conducted with a larger sample.

Generalizability of the study is limited by the size of the sample, the geographic location of the study, and the

homogeneous nature of the cohort. The core sample and young adult sample are Caucasian, Christian, were identified as gifted within the parameters of "optimum" giftedness, and attended public high schools with a total student body of under 1500 pupils. The middle-aged respondents were self defined as gifted adolescent academic underachievers who are successful at the present time; who are Caucasian, Christian, and residents of a small New England state. Findings are limited to samples drawn from similar populations.

It is suggested that the study be replicated with larger cohorts, including the following populations among the adolescent, young adult, and middle aged samples: gifted academic underachievers, gifted academic achievers, non-gifted academic achievers, and non-gifted academic underachievers. In addition, it might be appropriate to study a cohort of middle-aged adults who had been defined as gifted and underachieving in their high school years who are not successful in their middle age. It is also suggested that the study be replicated with adolescents and adults of different cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds to determine possible patterns of identity development in which academic underachievement may or may not play a role specific to each group.

Delimitations of the Study

A longitudinal study of the core sample (high school) and young adult (college-aged) respondents appears to be an appropriate means by which to validate the results of the the current study. Periodic follow-up on each subject, using the same research methods as have been used with the young adult and middle-aged cohorts would present a more complete picture of the developmental process of a group of gifted, underachieving adolescents. The evolution out of underachievement, the nature of the moratorium status, the importance of the role of others in determining career and life goals, and the time needed for this process to be completed could be examined in greater depth than was possible in this study.

The researcher has sent a short note (enclosed in a holiday greeting card) to each of the high school cohort and to the young adult sample, including the subject who did not participate, in which she has asked for data relative to their current statuses (See Appendix I) as a preliminary step toward a longitudinal study of academic underachievement in the gifted adolescent.

Reflections on Future Directions

The researcher has reflected on the opportunities for optimum growth and development that could become available to the gifted, adolescent underachiever if the phenomenon were to be considered "just another phase in growing up" for some adolescents.

Parents can become more aware of their underachieving child's need for social and interpersonal development during the adolescent years. They can attempt to provide meaningful work-related activities that might introduce the underachieving gifted adolescent to future occupations without making a life-long commitment at an early age, thus preventing foreclosure of the identity development process.

They can provide a "moratorium place"--time and space to explore the environment without censure for not doing something useful. They can be a sounding board for their children as they attempt to come to grips with and articulate the discrepancies they see between the ideal and the real world, without being judgmental.

They can work with the educational system to provide developmentally appropriate material for these students in the secondary school classroom, working toward a balance of academic curriculum that will be relevant to their adolescents' reality and will at the same time provide the needed cognitive material for future growth. They can work toward

inclusion of vocational courses that enable the child to see options within the workplace. They can refuse to collude with an educational system that fosters premature closure of the identity development through forced choice of career or post-secondary education directly following high school.

They can accept their underachieving adolescents for their positive qualities and understand that the academic world is not the most important part of their lives. They can recognize and support the adolescent in the active struggle for career and life goal direction even though they are frustrated by the seeming aimlessness and disorganization of their offspring.

The underachieving, gifted adolescent whose parents have reframed their attitude toward identity development and academic underachievement may feel that there is now a sanctioned option to explore the world for career and life direction after secondary school. The adolescent may begin to take academic risks because the fear of failure due to poor grades is not a factor in curricular choice. The underachieving gifted adolescent may develop positive rather than negative feelings about the relevance of high school to life, and may believe that school is a positive factor in the development of self concept.

The public secondary educational system as it is currently constructed in the United States could be restructured to reflect the actual developmental and educational needs of the gifted, underachieving adolescent. One major change might be the development of a five year curriculum for appropriate students that would combine meaningful work with relevant cognitive study presented as an interdisciplinary process. Grading policies in which there are always the labels of achiever and underachiever could be reorganized to reflect the strengths of each student.

Guidance personnel would be able to stop feeling responsible for the fact that interventions designed to correct or prevent underachievement in the gifted population do not have long term positive results. They could then focus on the developmental needs of the underachieving gifted adolescent to facilitate appropriate developmental change.

A major restructuring, (according to a reframed notion of the Eriksonian theory of identity development) of the family, educational, and greater community systems within which gifted underachieving adolescents function has the potential to facilitate the optimum growth and development of the young people in today's society whose major task is to find a sense of identity and purpose within their lives.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Letter and Permission Form

Dear _____

I am writing to you as a doctoral candidate in the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Education researching the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement for my doctoral dissertation.

I have worked for some years with gifted students, particularly those in the middle grades, and have observed many of my former students as they have grown to college age. One of my observations has been that a certain number of these students have been described as "underachieving", either by parents, school officials or others who are concerned with the well being and nurturing of the child. I am deeply interested in this phenomenon of underachievement, particularly when it occurs in our gifted young people. It is my basic assumption that all children have the right to the opportunity to grow and develop to their optimum potential and that we as parents and teachers are those who have the best opportunity to foster this development.

I would very much like to speak with your child about academic underachievement as part of my research project. I know first hand the frustration, anger and discouragement of being the parent of a child who has been labeled underachieving. My research indicates that little has been done to obtain a view of the phenomenon from the perspective of the adolescent gifted underachieving student. I believe that talking at length with a number of gifted adolescent academic underachievers will increase the information available to those who are responsible for nurturing and educating our gifted children and help us all to better understand the phenomenon. I am choosing to interview high school junior and seniors because they have had in most cases, a number of years in which they have not been achieving to potential. These young people are of an age where they can speak articulately and to the point. They may also be seeing the results of their underachievement as they participate in the upper level activities of PSAT's, SAT's and college selection processes.

I am requesting permission to interview your son/daughter about his/her academic underachievement. All interviews will be individual and confidential; they will be taped by

me and transcribed by me. Your child will have the right to refuse to answer any questions he/she does not want to answer and will also have the right to withdraw from participation in the project at any time. The dissertation resulting from the interview(s) will have names and characteristics changed to protect your child's privacy.

I am planning to meet with all parents who consent to their child's participation in the project before I interview any student in order to explain the project in depth to you. I will also be meeting with all the students prior to interviews to give them the information they need to participate fully in the project and to obtain their consent as well as yours.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have. Your help is valuable to all our gifted children. A consent form and self addressed, stamped envelope are enclosed for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Talu Robertson M.Ed.
Educational Consultant
Daniels Hill Road
Keene, NH 03431
(603)352-7006

I give permission for _____to participate in the research project on Gifted Adolescent Academic Underachievement conducted by Elsie H. Robertson. I understand my child will be interviewed by Ms. Robertson and that the information obtained will be used to shed light on the phenomenon of gifted academic underachievement. I understand that my child's right to privacy and anonymity will be respected and that Ms. Robertson and my child will be the only people to read the transcript of my child's interview. I understand that my child has the right to refuse to answer any questions he/she does not want to answer and that my child has the right to withdraw from participation in the project at any time.

Signed_____
Parent/Guardian

Date_____

Appendix B

Informed Consent

I give Elsie H. Robertson permission to interview me as a participant in her University of Massachusetts (Amherst) doctoral research project on Gifted Academic Underachievement and to use the information obtained from the interview in her dissertation.

I understand that this project consists of individual tape-recorded interviews with three different groups of people. The information gathered from the interviews will be used to shed light on the phenomenon of gifted adolescent academic underachievement.

I understand that benefits expected from participation in this project may include increased understanding of underachievement by parents, educators and others who are responsible for the upbringing and education of gifted students as well as a possible increased understanding of myself and my underachievement.

I understand that my participation in this project is for the purpose of gathering information and that there may be some embarrassment or discomfort in answering some of the questions about underachievement. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any questions I do not want to answer and that I am free to withdraw my consent and leave the project at any time without being penalized in any way. I understand that any questions I may have regarding the research procedures and/or project will be answered by Ms. Robertson. I understand that my taped interview when typed, will be seen only by Ms. Robertson and myself. My name and identifying characteristics will be changed to protect my anonymity. The dissertation and any other publication resulting from this process will be available to me upon request.

Participant
Signature:_____

Elsie H. Robertson, M.Ed.
Graduate School of Education
Hills South
University of Massachusetts
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Appendix C

Interview Questions
High School Sample

Category 1: Perceptions of Competency.

1. What do you do best?
2. What do you like to do best?
3. What do others tell you that you do best?
4. If you could choose only one of the three above activities to follow for the next six months, which would you choose? Why?
5. How satisfied would you be with your choice?

Category 2. Perceptions of Self.

1. How would you answer the question, "Who are you?"
2. How do you think your parents would answer that question?
3. Your peers?
4. Your teachers?
5. Your employer (if applicable)?
6. How do you feel about those definitions of your self?
   a. How accurate is the definition?
   b. How do you feel about your parents, peers, teachers, employer regarding the accuracy or inaccuracy of their portrait of you?

Category 3: Perceptions of Academic Competence.

1. How do you do in school?
2. What are your academic strengths?
3. What do you perceive to be your academic weaknesses?
4. How do you feel about how you do in school?
5. When you do well, what is it that helps you to do well?
6. Do you ever choose not to do well in school? Please explain.
7. How do you feel when you do not do well in school?
8. What are the consequences of consistently not doing well in school?
9. How do you think you learn best?

Category 4: Perceptions of Academic Purpose.

1. In your opinion what should the purposes of general education be?
2. In your opinion what purposes does your school attempt to accomplish?
3. How would your parents answer these two questions?
4. How would your teachers answer these two questions?
5. Imagine the ideal school for you, one where you could learn in ways you personally value. What would it be like?
6. What keeps you in school?

Category 5: Relationship of life experience to educational and Personal Identity.

1. What activities, events, and/or creative endeavors in your life have had the most meaning for you?
2. What events and activities have left you dissatisfied or unhappy?
3. What was the relationship of these activities to your life?
4. What relationship did any of these activities have to your school?
5. What do you see as two or three major challenges facing people today?
6. What relationship do they have to your life?
7. What relationship do these challenges have to your school?
8. What is the relationship between your current school experience and your evolving concept of self?
9. What are your plans for the future?
10. How does school, as it now stands, relate to your future plans?
11. If your could do whatever you wanted to do after you finish high school, what would you do?

Appendix D

Interview Questions
Young Adult Sample

Introduction:

1. Briefly, please bring me up to date on your life in general since our last interview.

2. How have your interests changed, if they have?

Category 1: Perceptions of High School Years

1. Describe your high school career.
   a. What was relevant?
   b. What was irrelevant?
   c. What was its effect on you at that time?
   d. What motivated you at that time?
   e. What motivates you now?

Category 2: Perceptions of Current Status

1. What is your current situation?
2. What is relevant now?
3. What is irrelevant to you now?
4. What is the effect of your high school years on you at this time in your life?
5. If you had it to do over, what would you do?

Category 3: Perceptions of Self

1. How do you see your self today?
2. How do you think your parents would answer that question?
3. How do you think your employers would answer that question?
4. How do you think your peers would answer that question?
5. How do you think your professors would answer that question?
6. What do you perceive your strengths and weaknesses to be, (a) personally, (b)academically, and (c) professionally?
7. How do you perceive that you have changed as a person?
8. How do you feel about any of the changes?

Category 4: Perceptions of Future Status
Academic and Career Purpose

1. What are your career/educational/life goals at the present time?
2. How are they similar to or different from your goals in high school?
3. How did your high school education impact these goals?
4. How did your parents influence these goals?
5. Where are you going from here?

Category 5: Perceptions of the role of Underachievement in Personal and Educational Life

1. What role did underachievement play in your life in high school?
2. What role, if any, does underachievement play in your life now?
3. How do you feel about it?
4. If you had it all to do over again, what would you do the same?
5. What would you do differently?
6. If you could give a junior high or high school student just one piece of advice, what would it

Appendix E

Interview Questions
Middle-Aged Sample

Adolescence
High School Years

1. Describe your high school career.

   What effect did high school have on you?
   What was relevant to you then?
   What was irrelevant?
   What motivated you then?
   What would you say your concept or picture of your self was at that point in your life?
   What career choices or plans for future education had you made?
   What would you say your area of greatest competence was at that point?
   What would you say other people thought of you then?
   What impact did it have compared to your own construct?
   What was the relevance of your high school education to your current career?
   How could it have been different?

2. Underachievement

   How did you underachieve?
   To what extent was underachievement a deliberate choice on your part?
   To what extent was underachievement a positive or negative force in your life?
   If you had it to do over, what, if anything, would you do differently?

Early Adulthood
College and Armed Forces Years

1. Describe your college career.

   What was relevant to you then?
   What was irrelevant?
   What motivated you then?
   What would you say your concept or picture of your self was at that point in your life?
   What career choices or plans for future

education had you made?
What would you say your area of greatest competence was at that point?
What would you say other people thought of you then?
What impact did it have compared to your own construct?
What was the relevance of your college education to your current career?
How could it have been different?

2. Underachievement

How did you underachieve?
To what extent was underachievement a deliberate choice on your part?
To what extent was underachievement a positive or negative force in your life?
If you had it to do over, what, if anything, would you do differently?

3. Military Service

What was the impact of service in the Armed Forces on your life?

Prime Adulthood
Career Years

1. Briefly describe your career path(s).
2. To what do you attribute your current success?
3. To what extent did the expectations of others in your earlier years affect/effect your career?
4. To what extent did the expectations of others (as you perceived them) play a part in how you perceived yourself in your earlier years?
5. To what extent do the expectations of others play a part in how you perceive yourself today?
6. What do your consider your major areas of competency today? What relationship do they have with your competencies of your earlier years?
7. What is the prime motivating force in your life today? How does it compare with your earlier years?
8. If you could do it all over, what would you do?

Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire
High School Sample

Name
Address
Telephone number
Age
Grade in School
Job (if working)

Parents or Guardian

Mother's name
Address
Telephone number
Occupation
Work Address
Work telephone number

Father's name
Address
Telephone number
Occupation
Work address
Work telephone number

Siblings

Name(s)
Age(s)
School grade(s)

What schools have you attended?

Have you ever been in a gifted program?

Are you currently in a gifted program?

What are your plans after high school graduation?

Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire
Young Adult and Middle-aged Sample

Name:

Address:

Telephone number:

Occupational Status:

Marital Status: M W S D

Age:

Siblings: sex and age

Formal Education:

Degree(s)	Year	Institution	Major field

Children: Names and ages

Were you ever told that you were gifted?

By whom: teacher parent peer other

Were you ever in a special program designed for the gifted?

When and where?

Have any of your children been identified as gifted/talented?

At what grade?

Were they ever enrolled in a gifted/talented program?

What and where?

Appendix H

Comparison Categories Among Adolescent Gifted and Average Academic Achievers and Underachievers

The Self

Perception of self as changing
Drive for Autonomy
Perception of sense of responsibility
Clear assessment of strengths and weaknesses
 Willingness to work to improve them
Drive to work on intra and interpersonal issues
Clarity about career goals
 Willingness to work on goals
Clarity about life goals
 Willingness to work on goals
Characteristics
   Participates in organized activities
   Is Uncommitted
   Is disorganized
   Is well rounded
   Is a procrastinator
   Views the world from a wide lens perspective
Perception that one is developing in an even progression
Perception that one is re-working earlier developmental issues.

School and the Self

Motivation to achieve academically
Distress at poor grades
Perception that school holds a central place in ones life
Perception of relationship between school and self concept
Perception of relevance of school to current issues
Perception of relevance of school to future issues

Consequences of Underachievement

Provides free time to do things that are pleasurable
Gives control over own life
Allows one to make independent decisions at one's own level
Provides choice of where to take responsibility
Provides space and time to deal with major issues of self, family, peers, and work
Assures one of attention from others
Guilt

Appendix I

Informal Questionnaire
Proposed Longitudinal Study
Gifted Adolescent Academic Underachievers

Name
Current Address
Current Telephone number
Are you still living at home?

Did you graduate from high school?

Where did you stand in your class (if you know)?

Between the time I interviewed you and the time you either graduated or left school, what happened to your grades?

stay the same, changed for the better, changed for the worse

What are you doing now? Please elaborate

- Attending a prep. school
- Attending college --what kind and where?
- Working
- Joined the Armed Forces
- Traveling
- Hanging about

Did you have any difficulty finding work, joining the armed forces, or being accepted into another school (whether prep. school or a college) because of your academic record?

What would you change about your high school career, if you could go back and do it over?

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